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Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG AT THE LAUNCH OF ANTARCTICA 2000 EXPEDITION  
ON FRIDAY, 12 MARCH 1999, AT THE ISTANA AT 7.00 PM

I am happy to join you to officially launch Antarctica 2000. For several members of the Singapore Antarctica 2000 team, it is another call of the wild after their successful journey to the top of the world on Mount Everest.

Until recently, one hardly hears about Antarctica in Singapore, much less shows any interest in it. We are in the tropics. Antarctica is the world's coldest and most windswept continent far away at the remote bottom of the earth. It is uninhabited. In a large part of Antarctica, the ice is more than 2 km thick. Only specially-equipped scientific research stations are located there. Not many

adventurers have trekked on this bleak land mass to the South Pole. Antarctica is, therefore, something awesome, mysterious and desolate.

Yet, a group of adventurers from Singapore has decided to do so and climb its highest peak. This is not a stroll in the Botanic Gardens or a climb up Bukit Timah Hill. It is certainly not a picnic. Are they idiosyncratic individuals out to prove that people from a hot and humid country can survive extreme cold? Is this a senseless trip for a few reckless thrill-seekers looking for dangers, or a glorified project which is better deferred till the economy picks up?

Certainly not. To the team, this expedition is a personal test of human limits and a journey of self-discovery. To me, their drive, passion and spirit to achieve an uncommon target has a larger meaning and purpose, which is why I am supporting the expedition.

Antarctica 2000 must be seen as another manifestation of the indomitable spirit of the people in Singapore. The history of our nation since independence has been a story of constant struggle against the odds and overcoming them. Singapore succeeds only if we dare to dream and dare to do. If an idea is worthy, let us support it. If a challenge makes us stronger, let us overcome our fears and conquer it. We can learn a lot from adventures. They hone our skills, sharpen our mind and gird our spirit. They create a society of rugged individuals able to face unpredictable challenges and the unknown.

To reach the South Pole and Antarctica's highest peak of Vinson Massif on 1 January 2000 requires team work, careful planning and preparation. Skill and creativity are needed. The discipline and mental toughness necessary to achieve this objective can only come from the brave who have an unyielding passion to do something out of the ordinary. I have no doubt that the expedition will show that the Singapore spirit is real and not just a mere notion.

As Singapore develops into an international centre for commerce, intellectual and knowledge capabilities and all kinds of services in the new millennium, we need boldness, tenacity and endurance to compete. In a globalised economy, we are no longer competing with people from our immediate neighbourhood. Our competitors are those further away who are much better equipped with technical skills and technological knowledge. We cannot afford to be parochial and passive. Instead, we must display the right attitude and aptitude to look outwards, beat the odds and gain concrete benefits for Singapore.

From "Everest to Antarctica" is not simply an adventure for a few. Their adventure will capture our imagination because it is perilous. It shows that urban people can be tough. From climbing the world's highest mountain to trying to overcome the harsh extremities in the far and cold end of our planet, we would have shown that Singapore has the guts and capability to take on formidable risks. The important message we would have delivered is that with careful preparation, training and abundant determination and courage, we can succeed in the most difficult task.

Antarctica 2000 deserves our full support. The Ministry of Information and the Arts  
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has supported it as a Millennium 2000 celebration event. The Singapore Sports Council and National Youth Council are also sponsoring the expedition. I am very glad that in spite of the economic downturn, corporate sponsors believe in the project and have contributed or committed resources to help the team. Their participation is most heartwarming. I must mention in particular the Government of Chile which is assisting the team in its endeavours. We appreciate deeply the Chilean goodwill and friendship.

In conclusion, I want to thank the members of the Singapore Antarctica 2000 team for showing us the spirit of adventure. The passion and grit of the team will be admired by all of us. However, I must stress that our admiration for you is not merely that you would have reached the South Pole or scaled the top of Vinson Massif. It is that we applaud your audacity and determination to conquer your fears when facing extremely harsh conditions. I wish you a successful journey.

It gives me great pleasure now to officially launch the first-ever Singapore Antarctica 2000 expedition.

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