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Subject: (EMBARGOED) Speech by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, 7 Nov 99, 9am

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG AT THE LAUNCH OF THE CLEAN AND GREEN WEEK 1999 ON SUNDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 1999, AT THE MARINA CITY PARK AT 9.00 AM

Singapore: An Environment-Conscious People

I am happy to see so many of you here on Tree Planting Day. Senior Minister
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started this tradition of involving the community in planting trees way back in 1971. We are planting 2000 trees today to continue with this worthwhile tradition. Why 2000 trees when it is 1999? It is to affirm our commitment to maintain Singapore as a garden city in the new millennium.

2 This year's Tree Planting Day also marks the 10th Anniversary of the annual Clean and Green Week. It is timely to ask ourselves whether we have succeeded in making Singapore cleaner and greener.

3 Our refuse and wastewater are collected and disposed of daily through modern and efficient waste management systems. Our housing estates are well maintained, especially in precincts which have been upgraded. Our parks are practically at our doorsteps. Our public places are beautifully landscaped. Our air quality is high, except when we have the occasional unwelcome haze from outside. We have a good international reputation as a clean and green city.

4 It is no mean achievement for a densely populated country of nearly four million to keep its environment clean and green. Very few cities in the world of comparable densities do as well as us. We have succeeded because we went green long before the Greens in the world put a premium on the environment. Ours is an action-oriented green movement with strong support and co-operation of the community.

Sustainability Partnership

5 Our people understand that a clean and green environment adds to the quality of life. Grassroots organisations hold regular neighbourhood cleanliness activities and tree-planting. These activities inculcate good habits in residents. Schools too are doing their part. They involve their students in community work such as collecting old newspapers for recycling, and maintaining public parks which they have adopted.

6 More encouraging is the emergence of a volunteer civic movement to improve our environment. Environmental groups like The Green Volunteer Network and the Waterways Watch Society have emerged. Coming from all walks of life – housewives, retirees, students and professionals – these people share a common desire to do their bit for the environment. Their contributions make a difference. They are our active citizens of Singapore 21.

7 Today, we will be recognising several organisations and individuals for their significant contributions in environmental protection. However, I would like to urge more people to join them or to follow their example. We still have pockets of residential and public places which are dirty and badly maintained. A minority of our citizens are still unwilling to exercise discipline and make the effort to keep Singapore clean and green. We will not be a gracious society if we have to depend only on our hardworking cleaning workers to ensure a litter-free environment or clean public toilets.

Environmental Challenges in the New Millennium

8 Looking into the future, a pressing challenge is how to dispose of the increasing amount of waste generated by a growing economy and an affluent people. We have run out of landfill space on mainland Singapore. The last landfill, in Lorong Halus, ceased operations in April this year when it was all filled up. We have to build new facilities, such as the offshore landfill at Pulau Semakau, and a fourth incineration plant. These cost a lot of money. Hence, Singaporeans should not take our clean environment for granted. They should understand and appreciate the tremendous amount of effort and organisation put in to keep Singapore free of garbage.

9 We should cultivate in Singaporeans a sense of ownership of the environment. We all value the homes we own, and look after them painstakingly. But many of us take the attitude that as we do not own the public space, we are not responsible for its upkeep. That is wrong. We must change this bad attitude. We own the public places collectively and we must care for them like we would our own homes. When I visit a place, I judge the people by how clean they have kept their common areas, not how neat their homes are. We can have a world-class home, the best home for Singaporeans, only if our citizens are socially-concerned. This includes doing their part to maintain the quality of their environment, not just their nest.

Conclusion

10 To conclude, let me thank all of you for coming to this event to create a beautiful environment for the future downtown of Singapore. Take the time to know more about the trees you are planting. Trees may not talk but they are living things. They are not all the same. They have different characteristics, and even different personalities. They respond to tender loving care. We are planting some 13 different species of trees today. Take yourself and your children to events like "Spot the Trees" Contest on Pulau Ubin and other parks in Singapore which the People's Association and the National Parks Board are organising.

11 It now gives me great pleasure to launch this year's Clean and Green Week. This is the last clean and green campaign for this century. Let us welcome the next millennium by pledging to do more for a clean and green Singapore.