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SPEECH BY MR WONG KAN SENG, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS AT THE GROUND-BREAKING CEREMONY FOR THE REDEVELOPMENT OF CHANGI PRISON COMPLEX ON FRIDAY 31 DECEMBER 99 AT 9.30 AM

Director, Prisons

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

National Archives of Singapore

We are at the threshold of a new Millennium. On this day, I am happy to be with you to break ground for the new Changi Prison Complex.

2 The Prisons Department is a key member of the Home Team. It has played and will continue to play a crucial role in keeping Singapore safe and secure. It has been protecting society from law-breakers by confining them in secure custody, and helping them turn over a new leaf and return to society as responsible, productive citizens.

3 The Prisons Department has done well despite not having modern, purpose-built infrastructure. Most of the prison facilities were converted from old schools, quarters and military barracks. For example, Portsdown Prison was formerly a disused military barracks. The Kaki Bukit and Selarang Park Drug Rehabilitation Centres were respectively a primary school and British military quarters.

4 The inmate population continues to grow, in tandem with population trends. Severe prisons overcrowding can bring about health and security risks.

5 Currently, the 14 prisons and drug rehabilitation centres are spread out all over the island. This results in inefficient use of land, manpower and other resources.

6 Ladies and Gentlemen, the new Changi Prison Complex that will rise here will eliminate these inefficiencies.

New Changi Prison Complex

7 The new Complex will consist of 20 institutions and support facilities. The institutions will be arranged in four main clusters. The completed Complex will have a designed capacity of 23,000 prisoners. This number is about twice the combined capacity of all our existing prisons.

8 The Department will also employ up-to-date technology to bring the Complex up to mark with some of the world's most secure prisons. This will enhance the Department's effectiveness and raise staff productivity.

9 The concentration of all prison facilities in one complex will also bring about economies of scale and the optimisation of resources. Work processes and procedures will be simpler, for example, when there is a need to transfer inmates from one institution or facility to another. Such economies of scale and resource optimisation will result in significant long term cost savings.

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10 The Changi Prison Complex will optimise land use by going multi-storey. The new Complex will also offer better facilities for the rehabilitation of prisoners with a school, a medical centre, workshops, sports facilities and special areas for training, corrective programmes, counselling and religious worship.

11 The centralisation of prison facilities within the Complex will also enable parcels of land currently occupied by prison facilities to be freed for better uses. With the completion of the new Complex, a total of 61 hectares of valuable land distributed throughout our island will be available for development.

Software

12 While the new Changi Prison Complex will cater to ‘hardware’ renewal needs, the Prisons Department has not neglected the need to re-develop software.

13 A new rehabilitation framework is being put in place to better identify and help inmates who want to turn over a new leaf. The Department is also developing a new inmate management system. In this system, a personal supervisor is assigned work with each inmate to better understand and together chart a personal route-map for the inmate’s recovery. These initiatives will mature in time to improve the rate of rehabilitation.

Prisons Department’s Vision

14 To synergise the ‘hardware’ with the ‘software’, the Prisons Department has a vision - Prisons officers have set their goal to be captains in the lives of the inmates they supervise. They see themselves as steering prisoners towards being responsible citizens. They will do so together with the support of the offenders’ families and the community. To the prison officers, “Every Singaporean Matters”, even when he is an offender.

15 It is my pleasure to break ground for the new Changi Prison Complex.

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