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Subject: (EMBARGOED) Speech by Mr Goh Chok Tong, 19 March 2000, 9.30 am

# *Singapore Government*

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**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY PRIME MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG, AT  
THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (CDC) SEMINAR AT  
THE GRASSROOTS' CLUB ON SUNDAY, 19 MARCH 2000, AT 9.30 AM**

**CDCs: LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND**  
**COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE**

## National Archives of Singapore

In 1997, at the Swearing-in Ceremony of Mayors Ow Chin Hock and Eugene Yap, I said that the challenge for Community Development Councils (CDCs) was to build a cohesive, compassionate and harmonious community. I envisioned CDCs doing this through fostering the spirit of community self-reliance and self-help.

2 In 1999, I launched the Singapore 21 (S21) Vision emphasising the importance of strengthening our "heartware". Heartware includes our concern for one another, our collective will as a people, and the sense of belonging to the same family.

3 Developing “heartware” is a never-ending process, unlike building hardware such as an expressway or a block of HDB flats. Heartware is developed through continually building bonds and relationships, nurturing compassion and commitments towards each other, reinforcing pride and identity, and getting a community to care for its own members. The CDCs are critical links of the S21 process. Their programmes should bring out the compassion residing in their respective communities.

4 Prosperity and economic growth alone are not sufficient to give us a good life. We need a closely-knit and active citizenry to make our Singapore a happy home. We also must have four essential strengths. First, there must be a high level of trust between the different community groups. Second, everyone must feel an obligation to help each other. Third, we must share a deep-seated sense of rootedness and common destiny. And fourth, we must take on greater responsibility for our own well being, for example, in bringing about a safer and cleaner environment. In charting the future directions of the CDCs, we must keep in mind our shared vision of building a vibrant community with one heart. Let me elaborate.

### Lowering Race Divides

5 Last year in Parliament, I spoke of the need to continually work at closing our race divides to build the Singapore nation. The CDCs can help towards this end by encouraging and facilitating interactions between the different ethnic communities. They can do so in partnership with other civic groups. In so doing, the CDCs enlarge the common level playing field where all Singaporeans work, live and play together.

### Fostering Community Compassion

6 Meritocracy is a key factor driving Singapore’s success. But it also results in different rewards as people have different abilities.

7 Whether we like it or not, rapid globalisation and the new economy based

on knowledge and IT will accentuate the differences in income levels. Already, we are seeing young, entrepreneurial and IT-savvy Singaporeans becoming multi-millionaires overnight through dot.com IPOs. On the other hand, we also see the less skilled and less qualified exposed to greater risks of retrenchment and struggling to do well.

8 To prevent our social cohesion from being loosened by an income or wealth divide, we must imbue our more successful members with a sense of obligation towards the less successful and able. We must also create more opportunities for people of different abilities and talents to fulfil themselves and to contribute to society. The CDCs can help to balance our system of meritocracy and highly competitive environment with compassion and community help. Here, an important task of the CDCs is to provide the social glue to bond residents into a cohesive community. Just as the “kampongs” of the past tapped the contributions of everyone through the “gotong royong” spirit to solve the local problems of their time, so the CDCs too must harness the energy of our citizens and galvanise them to tackle the social challenges of the 21st century.

### Strengthening Rootedness and Heartbeat

9 Singapore can remain strong only if we feel a deep-seated sense of belonging and rootedness to Singapore. Last year, I raised the possibility of a new divide emerging in our society. My shorthand description of this trend is “the Cosmopolitan and the Heartlander”. The cosmopolitan is the one who has the skills and the global outlook that enable him to do well almost anywhere in the world. The heartlander, on the other hand, has a more domestic outlook. Both groups need each other and are important in making Singapore tick. The heartlanders nurture the cosmopolitans, while the cosmopolitans create opportunities that benefit the heartlanders. If cosmopolitans and heartlanders cease to identify with each other, our society will fall apart.

10 Both cosmopolitans and heartlanders must share the same Singapore heartbeat. That is why we must encourage participation from all citizens in the affairs of our country. CDCs are led by elected representatives and constituency

advisers, but their strength comes from the active support and contribution of civic-minded citizens. When Singaporeans, cosmopolitans and heartlanders together, play an active part in looking after their present and future, their bonds with one another and with Singapore will grow.

### More Responsibilities and Resources for CDCs

11 Your workshop discussions should look at how we can realise the vision and mission of the CDCs, in particular, at the ideas I am proposing.

12 As CDCs have already gained some experience, I intend to give more authority, responsibilities and resources to them. On their part, the CDCs should also generate more resources themselves, and initiate their own flagship programmes that improve the lives of their residents. As the CDCs do more, the local community will then feel a greater stake in CDC's work, and a greater willingness to take part in CDC's programmes.

13 At present, the frontline functions for Public Assistance Scheme, Rent and Utilities Assistance Scheme, and Small Families Improvement Scheme have already been handed over to the CDCs. In the middle of this year, Marine Parade and Tanjong Pagar CDCs will take over two broad areas of responsibilities from the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS). First, the two CDCs will take over the administration of all of MCDS' social assistance programmes. They will be responsible for processing applications, investigating, assessing, and deciding on all requests for financial assistance by their residents. Second, the two CDCs will also take on MCDS' current roles of developing and funding childcare centres, student care centres and family service centres. They will be responsible for local implementation of MCDS' master plan for these delegated services. MCDS will continue to develop national policies in these two areas. It will also continue to set the national framework for social services, develop national policies on social affairs and perform its existing regulatory functions.

14 Around the middle of next year, these functions that are being delegated to Marine Parade and Tanjong Pagar CDCs will also be delegated to the other

CDCs.

### CDCs as Local Authorities

15 We start with delegating MCDS' services because these are most relevant to the spirit of community self-help. Over time, we want the CDCs to do more. We want to evolve them into local authorities that deliver a wide range of community and public services, not just welfare services. If CDCs can cope, the Government will delegate to them more government functions which can be better discharged at local level. I see CDCs evolving into a system of local administration, where each community is empowered to look after its own local concerns. For example, environmental safety and cleanliness, parks and recreation projects, upgrading of public areas, health screening for the elderly, and the registration of marriages and births can be considered for delegation to the CDCs. The CDCs will also be consulted for more local inputs, in such areas as traffic management, public transport, environment protection and neighbourhood policing.

16 Another area where CDCs can play a leading role is youth development, especially in reaching out to youths at risk of falling into delinquency. Here, CDCs can work with schools to mould active, socially responsible young Singaporeans to serve their communities.

17 There are benefits in devolving more direct services to CDCs.

18 Firstly, in doing so, the Ministries previously handling these responsibilities can focus on their core businesses of policy development, master planning and regulation. Greater efficiency within Government will result.

19 Secondly, the CDCs, being closer to the ground, will be more attuned and responsive to the specific needs of their own communities. Despite Singapore's compactness, there are variations in terms of population profile and the needs of the communities. The CDCs, in partnership with voluntary welfare organisations, civic groups and others can develop programmes and services that are customised to the specific needs of their respective communities.

20 To illustrate, the ability to respond quickly and flexibly is important in social services. If it is handled by a central ministry, it has to be a one-size-fits-all solution. It can also be rather impersonal. Through the CDCs, we can combine this adaptability and flexibility with the well-tested principles of good governance such as accountability, transparency and incorruptibility. By involving the community, the CDCs can deliver more personalised services.

21 Thirdly, the CDCs can cut across the functional boundaries of Ministries and become a focal point for residents to access a whole range of related services. An example is in the area of social assistance. The problems a disadvantaged family faces are not confined to a single ministry. Families in financial distress require access to job and training opportunities, counselling and support services from family service centres, educational bursaries for their children and so on. By putting social assistance with the CDCs, the family which seeks help will be better served.

22 The CDCs are still relatively new. They are still evolving. I want to grow a form of community governance out of the CDCs. I will touch on some areas which you can follow up in your workshop discussions.

### Community Governance

23 Today, some people see the CDCs as part of the grassroots organisations, like a super CCC. This is not an accurate perception. The CDC is more than a grassroots organisation. It is a form of community governance. It is run by MPs or constituency advisers and councillors. Hence, it comprises both grassroots leaders and administrators, professionals and other able people from outside. But as a community organisation, the support of local grassroots leaders is critical.

24 Although the CDCs are hardly three years old, they must create a mechanism for leadership infusion and renewal. We should avoid appointing the same members to serve the CDCs for more than, say, three or four terms. While we recognise and appreciate the contributions of serving members, new

blood and fresh ideas must flow in. This is similar to self-renewal of PAP MPs in Parliament. It is the job of the Mayors and CDC Chairmen to identify able people and bring them into the CDCs.

25 The CDCs will be supported by a corps of professional support staff as is the case with Ministries. These staff must have the same high standards of integrity, commitment and competence as their colleagues in the Civil Service. Young Administrative Officers will spend some time in the CDCs as part of their career moves. Then they will have a better understanding of how government policies affect the people before they themselves formulate policies as senior civil servants.

26 The budget for the CDCs will not come totally from the Government. Staff costs will, of course, be met fully by the Government. Programmes delegated to the CDCs will continue to receive government funding. But there will be many projects which the CDCs wish to initiate, for example, a one-off grant for families who found themselves in sudden distress. These are community-initiated projects which the community itself must produce the seed money. The Government will support such projects by making available additional funds according to some contribution formula. This way, we encourage a community to look after itself, with government support.

#### Appointing More Mayors

27 A key service that touches many in the community is HDB estate management undertaken by the Town Councils (TCs). The TCs will be kept separate from the CDCs. But there is synergy in putting TC services and CDC functions under a mayor, where possible. Then, local residents can identify the mayor as the person they can look to for both municipal and local community services.

28 The Government intends to appoint more mayors to take charge of both TC and CDC functions. The plan, in the longer term, is to divide Singapore into five or six CDC Districts, with each district being headed by a mayor.

29 As we devolve more government functions to the CDCs, the size of a mayor's job will increase. Mayors will be full-time political office-holders. Some may hold concurrent political appointments in the Government.

### CDC District Meetings

30 Just as Government policies and programmes are scrutinised by Parliament, there should also be an avenue where residents have the opportunity to give their feedback, comments, or even question the management or efficacy of the CDCs' programmes. This should be done as the CDCs are largely funded by the Government and the community.

31 I propose that the mayors hold half-yearly District meetings with grassroots leaders who are not councillors. The grassroots leaders can be rotated. Their ears are close to the ground, and they can function like backbencher MPs during Parliament sittings. Other interested parties, for example, the management of voluntary welfare organisations and civic groups operating in the District, and the residents may be invited as observers at such meetings. This will lead to greater accountability and transparency in CDCs' work. It will also be a forum for wider community participation in local affairs.

32 The proceedings of such half-yearly District meetings should be conducted with dignity, decorum and order. They are not dialogue sessions. They are more like Parliament sittings but are less formal. Rules will have to be drawn up for the smooth functioning of these meetings.

### Conclusion

33 Singapore's continued prosperity and success will depend not only on its ability to maintain a strong and competitive economy but also on its ability to develop a strong and cohesive society. By getting communities to manage their own affairs through the CDCs, we hope to strengthen Singapore's social fabric.

34 I hope this Seminar will generate more new ideas which will help the CDCs realise their vision of building a vibrant community with shared interests.



Thank you.

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