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Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by Minister Wong Kan Seng, 28 April 2000, 7 pm

Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY MR WONG KAN SENG, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS AND MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR BISHAN-TOA PAYOH GROUP REPRESENTATION CONSTITUENCY AT THE LAUNCH OF THE HDB 40TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATIVE BOOK ON FRIDAY, 28 APRIL 2000 AT 7.00 PM AT THE VIEWING GALLERY OF BLOCK 81, TOA PAYOH

Good evening

Residents

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am happy to be here to launch the Housing & Development Board (HDB) 40th anniversary commemorative book, entitled "Toa Payoh, Our Kind of Neighbourhood".

2 Toa Payoh Town is a microcosm of comfortable living in a multi-racial Singapore. Standing here at the viewing gallery, we have a panoramic view of towering flats well served by shopping, recreation and educational amenities,

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and an integrated bus and MRT network. Just within a 10-minute walk from here, there are numerous communal facilities for residents to meet and mingle, including three Community Clubs, a town park, a swimming pool and a library. Within the same area, there are sacred places for worship nestled among the flats, including a mosque, three Chinese temples, a Hindu temple and two churches reflecting the multi-religious setting of Singapore. Just strolling along the Lorongs in Toa Payoh is a cosy, secure and multi-cultural experience.

3 But a house is not a home if it is without love and care. Likewise, a housing estate is not a community if there are no bonds and warmth. Beyond physical attributes, it is the heartware that really makes a community and Singapore tick. A HDB void-deck is not an empty space in your heart if that was where you attended the wedding of your Malay neighbour's son, the small boy whom you have watched growing up, where the melodious beat of the komping still rings in your ears. It is also the place of the wake where you shared the grief of the passing of an aged Cantonese neighbour. In between, there were those void-deck Residents' Committee block parties which you and your family had enjoyed.

4 Toa Payoh has an exciting future ahead of it as well. Being one of the first HDB towns to be redeveloped under an Estate Renewal Masterplan, it is steadily being transformed and renewed. I, myself, am a witness to and participant of the exciting changes being wrought in this town. Toa Payoh holds a special place in my heart. My association with this town began as early as 1984, when I became the Member of Parliament for Kuo Chuan Constituency. This link became stronger when Kuo Chuan merged with Boon Teck and Toa Payoh to form Toa Payoh GRC in 1988. Toa Payoh came under my care. Although I was subsequently transferred to contest in Thomson GRC in 1991, in a sense, I never really left. Because in 1997, Toa Payoh GRC, Kim Keat and a substantial portion of Thomson GRC merged to form a much bigger Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC.

5 I understand that planning for this book started early, when Mr Hsuan Owyang, then HDB's Chairman, mooted the idea of using Toa Payoh as a platform for telling the success of Singapore's public housing. While this was a gem of an idea, it would not have been realised without the wonderful cooperation of the residents involved in this commemorative book. They played a critical role in helping the book capture the strong spirit of community that is Toa Payoh's.

6 I commend the HDB for choosing to tell the story of Singapore's public housing from the perspective and anecdotes of the residents of a pioneer town, instead of the conventional approach to convey its corporate history. Because it is both housing hardware and software, combined with community heartware, that have shaped our success over the past four decades. I hope that this book will serve as both a tribute and a source of inspiration for all, and help us to further realise our vision to make Singapore our best home.

7 It is my pleasure now to launch this commemorative publication "Toa Payoh, Our Kind of Neighbourhood".

Thank you.

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