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Singapore Government

MEDIA RELEASE

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SPEECH BY RADM TEO CHEE HEAN, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE AT THE BP INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MENTORING PROGRAMME 5TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS AT THE SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC AUDITORIUM ON SAT 3 JUNE 2000 @ 3.17 PM

Mr Koh Kim Wah, President BP Singapore,
Mr Mathew Yap, Chairman, National Mentoring Network and President of BP
International Student Mentoring Programme,
Fellow educators, youth workers, students, ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for inviting me to join in the BP International Student
Mentoring 5th Anniversary Celebrations.

2 As we sail through life, we switch between playing the role of mentee or mentor. As children, we may have turned to an older sibling for advice on how to get out of scraps that we landed in. When we are new at work, we look to a more experienced colleague to point us in the right direction so that a job gets done faster and more efficiently. In doing so, the learning process becomes less difficult. When we are more experienced, we ourselves take on the role of mentors showing newcomers the ropes. Basically the principle is that we learn faster and grow further if we have a support network.

3 Our schools espouse this principle. Many of our primary schools today have a buddy scheme for primary 1 students, where an older pupil from primary 5 or 6, is paired with a Primary 1 pupil. The P5 pupil is tasked with showing the P1 pupil how to buy food in the canteen, what to do and not to do in the library, and where the washroom is. These simple routines can baffle a six-year-old who suddenly finds himself without his parents, grandparents, or older brother or sister to point him in the right direction. So an older buddy can help ease the younger pupil into school life, and at the same time, he learns the meaning of responsibility.

4 We also have junior colleges, secondary schools and primary schools that pair up and conduct programmes where older students work alongside younger charges. Examples of such collaborative activities are peer tutoring exercises, peer mediation, and camps. They aim to teach the older pupils to be responsible for themselves and for another person, and to share and care. The younger ones benefit from the attention shown by an older, more knowledgeable, and more mature brother or sister who can show the way to completing a task. Such programmes aim to imbue our young with a sense of responsibility not merely to themselves but also to their community, for we are but part of a larger whole, be it the family, neighbourhood, community, society or nation.

5 Helping our young people grow with the right values is a cooperative enterprise. Parents have the primary responsibility. Schools and community groups too have important roles to play together with parents to promote and reinforce what is positive, and to lead and guide away from the negative. The BP International Student Mentoring Programme is a good example of a support network that helps promote positive values and build character in our young.

6 The programme matches children from disadvantaged home backgrounds with secondary or tertiary students who act as mentors, confidants and role models. The programme has borne fruit. A survey of 201 mentees conducted by the organisers in May 2000 saw 90% report that they now feel more confident and feel better about themselves. 87% reported that they now cope better with academic work, and that has led to a positive impact on their relationship with teachers and peers in school too. The mentors have also reported that their mentees have improved in behaviour and in their attitude towards studies. This is borne out by feedback and response from teachers of the mentees. These results attest to the importance of a positive self-concept and its direct effect on academic achievement. It is clear that with a little of the

right type of attention, help and genuine care from their mentors, mentees become better sons or daughters and better students, and gain a more positive outlook about life and their future.

7 The mentors themselves have gained too: they have benefited from a self-directed experiential learning journey, and acquired leadership, time-management, communication and organisational skills. The programme is also a healthy outlet for youthful energies which may otherwise be spent in less meaningful ways.

8 The BP International Student Mentoring Programme has run for five years now. I understand that about 500 mentors are recruited at university and polytechnic matriculation each year, and the volunteers themselves help recruit another 1,000 by enthusing friends and relatives to participate. This is active citizenry at work indeed; it must mean that these student mentors believe in it so much that they can convince others to join them in contributing; and it must mean that they do such a good job that others are convinced that it is a worthwhile cause. These are steps in building a gracious, compassionate and cohesive society. In helping others, we become a better people too. In recognition of their service and to encourage students to volunteer as mentors to younger peers, the Ministry of Education has joined hands with the National Mentoring Network to launch a new service badge this year, given to mentors who have contributed 50 hours of service, or more. It is but a small gesture compared to the effort and time that mentors put into their work with their mentees, but we hope they would be proud to wear it.

9 May I congratulate and thank all who are involved in the mentoring movement, many of whom serve more than 100 hours a year lending help, support and guidance to another. You can feel proud that you have made a difference in someone's life.

10 It's my pleasure now to open the BP International Student Mentoring Programme 5th Anniversary Celebrations.