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**SPEECH BY DR TONY TAN KENG YAM, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
AND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT THE AYER RAJAH 20TH
ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION DINNER HELD ON SATURDAY, 30
DECEMBER 2000 AT 8.00 PM**

Dr Tan Cheng Bock

Member of Parliament for Ayer Rajah Constituency
and Adviser to Ayer Rajah GROs

Distinguished Guests

Friends and Residents of Ayer Rajah

I would first like to thank your Member of Parliament, Dr Tan Cheng Bock, and your community leaders for kindly inviting me and my wife to join you this evening to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of Ayer Rajah.

Twenty years ago, Ayer Rajah was formed as a constituency. Ayer Rajah was then a rural community of fruit plantations, prawn ponds and kampongs.

Today, Ayer Rajah is a sprawling public and private housing estate with excellent infrastructure, modern public amenities and many recreational facilities.

I am sure the residents of Ayer Rajah are very happy and proud of the progress that has taken place in your constituency.

I would like to commend Dr Tan Cheng Bock, your Member of Parliament for Ayer Rajah since 1980, on his dedicated and enthusiastic work in the constituency.

Cheng Bock has been a good MP, hardworking, enthusiastic and concerned for his constituents.

Over the last two decades, Cheng Bock has established a strong rapport with the residents of Ayer Rajah.

The overwhelming mandate which Cheng Bock received at the last five General Elections with no less than 70% of the popular votes is a testimony of the residents' strong support for him.

Garnering the involvement of the residents is an important strategy for building an active community.

Cheng Bock knows this and has emphasised this aspect in his work.

He has enthused many residents to serve the community.

Together with the committed grassroots volunteers, Cheng Bock has successfully worked with the Town Council, HDB and other agencies to bring about significant improvements in Ayer Rajah.

One such improvement is the co-location of Ayer Rajah Community Centre with a day care centre for senior citizens and children and a special centre for disabled people.

This first of its kind project has benefited many residents in Ayer Rajah since it was first launched in March 1999.

Fostering a strong sense of community identity is important to the building of a cohesive community.

In Ayer Rajah, Cheng Bock has played a crucial role in enhancing the bonding

in the community.

He has leveraged on the network of grassroots organisations in the constituency to promote neighbourliness, and care and concern among the residents.

Residents' active participation in and contributions to the many community projects have fostered closer ties and anchored them to the community.

In Ayer Rajah, the residents have a strong sense of belonging to the constituency.

Ayer Rajah reflects the social development and progress Singapore has enjoyed since our independence in 1965.

Although Singapore has achieved much in the last 35 years, we have to always remember that the peace and progress that we enjoy does not come naturally.

Ethnic and religious harmony in Singapore is not a given.

They have to be carefully and deliberately nurtured.

Singaporeans should always remember that we are a multi-cultural society with different races, languages and religions.

We have to accept that these differences exist and cannot be wished away.

Our future will depend on whether we can continue to forge unity and harmony within our diversity.

We must, therefore, work and live as one united people and never allow the politics of race and religion to divide our people.

Ayer Rajah has achieved much in the last 20 years but building a community is an on-going job which can never be completed.

The momentum of the good work in Ayer Rajah must be sustained.

Community needs are never stagnant.

They are always changing.

Ayer Rajah like other mature constituencies needs to rejuvenate itself to meet the new lifestyles and higher expectations of Singaporeans.

We need to explore new ways to make old neighbourhoods better for the residents.

The upgrading of physical facilities and improvements to the living environment must go hand in hand with the promotion of an active community where all contribute readily to the nation.

Good community leadership is important in building a caring and vibrant community.

In this respect, volunteers with leadership skills, ideas, resources and management expertise are needed to plan and organise quality programmes for the people.

I would like to encourage more residents of Ayer Rajah to come forward and serve the community under the leadership of your MP, Dr Tan Cheng Bock, and your community leaders.

With your support, I am confident that Cheng Bock and his community leaders will achieve even greater success in building a strong and active community in Ayer Rajah.

Thank you and Happy New Year.

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