

**REMARKS BY SENIOR MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG AT FORT  
TANJONG KATONG "RAISING HISTORY, PLANTING ROOTS" FUND-  
RAISING DINNER, 7.30 PM, 27 NOV 04, SUNTEC SINGAPORE  
INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION AND EXHIBITION CENTRE**

History is often a beacon to the future. Knowledge of who were our forefathers, what they did and how they lived is imperative. Such insights foster a greater sense of common history, national identity and shared destiny among Singaporeans. Understanding how we got here is a guide on where we should go next. I therefore wish to thank Andy Gan and the Mountbatten Citizens' Consultative Committee members for their leadership and contributions towards deepening our understanding of a part of Singapore's history.

2 Singapore is a young nation. But we have an interesting history and colorful cultural heritage. We know that Singapore used to be a small fishing village during the times of Parameswara. We know that Admiral Cheng Ho had sailed past and that we became a British trading post after Sir Stamford Raffles set foot here in 1819. We also know that our forefathers were immigrants from China, India and the Malay Archipelago, and how we all became Singaporeans. However, much less is known about most specific areas in Singapore and the communities which lived there and their activities.

3 Singapore's history is the collection of the experiences of all our forefathers. Knowledge of our history would not be complete without information on the social and economic development of various parts of our island. The resurrection of Fort Tanjong Katong opens not just another window into Singapore's past. It also provides an invaluable glimpse on the historical role of the eastern part of Singapore.

4 Before the project, many people thought of the fort as a weapon of war. On the contrary, it was actually an instrument of peace. The fort's cannons were never fired in anger. In fact, the primary reason for its construction was to deter foreign invaders, and protect shippers and port workers at the then Keppel Harbour. In short, the fort was a guardian of

Singapore's early economic prosperity. It is therefore an integral part of our early history.

5 History used to be something we study in the classroom or experience during an occasional visit to a museum. Andy Gan and his grassroots leaders have brought the history of Fort Tanjong Katong right into the heart of Mountbatten, to the doorsteps of residents. Since the project's launch in September this year, Singapore's colonial past is no longer a remote notion for the residents of Mountbatten and Marine Parade GRC. It has suddenly come alive. It became an exciting journey of discovery – a learning adventure for both young and old.

6 The Fort Tanjong Katong project has played a significant role in fostering community bonding. I was told that more than 1,000 volunteers, so far, have participated in the excavation works. Some came as part of community, corporate or school groups. But many were just average Singaporeans who walked-in voluntarily to participate in the resurrection of Singapore's history. There were also family groups. Many came with three or four-generation of family members. Even grandparents in their sixties and seventies brought their pre-school grandchildren to participate in the excavation works.

7 Although many participants did not know one another, I am heartened that they had worked together hand-in-hand, regardless of race, language or religion, towards a common purpose. This is precisely the kind of Singapore spirit required to ensure our country's continued success.

8 According to the project archaeologist, the magnetic pull of the project has stretched beyond Singapore's shores. A number of Singaporean students overseas have indicated that they would be returning during their holidays to participate in the excavation rather than vacation elsewhere. This is indeed heart-warming. I hope that more overseas Singaporeans would use such opportunities to maintain their community ties and deepen their roots in Singapore.

9 Once again, I wish to congratulate the organizers and sponsors for supporting such a meaningful project. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance rendered by the National Parks Board, National Heritage Board, National University of Singapore, People's Association, Southeast CDC, Singapore History Museum and Singapore Institute of Architects. All of you

have made an invaluable and lasting contribution towards enriching our heritage, educating our youths and helping Singapore build an even more cohesive society and resilient national identity.

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