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SPEECH BY MR ONG SOO CHUAN, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY,
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AT THE "WATER IS PRECIOUS"
EXHIBITION ON SATURDAY, 17TH MARCH 1973 AT 7.30 P.M.
AT THE NEW SOON COMMUNITY CENTRE

"Digging well at times when one is thirsty" is a Chinese proverb well-known among the people. It reminds us not to have the bad habits of exploring water only when one is thirsty.

Water is important to human lives and in Latin it means "vital to our life". One cannot deny the fact that human preference for food has changed constantly with the progress of civilisation, but the human need for water remains unchanged. There is no substitute for water.

Although we are not living in a desert country, but owing to its size and population, we are confronted with limited water supply. To cater for the increasing demand of water consumption for both domestic and industrial consumptions, we must let our people realise that Water is the best thing in the world through education. Without water, no man would survive for more than a few days.

Historical incidents show that dispute over the monopoly of water sources often led to conflicts between individuals and even wars between countries. It is an established fact that human civilisation took root and flourished in places where fresh water supply was in abundance.

As water is limited in our island State, besides importing water from our neighbour, much money was spent to expand the entire

water system, so as to meet the ever increasing demand of our population. Expenditure on water projects in the past decade (1961-1971) was \$140 million and would require another \$140 million to develop new schemes in the next three years. This tremendous increase in development outlay will inevitably be reflected in the rising cost of water in the years ahead.

In the past two decades, water consumption has increased from 30 million gallons to over 110 million gallons per day. How has this considerable increase of water consumption come about? There are two main factors. The first is the population growth. Over the period of 20 years, Singapore's population has doubled. At the same time, the tremendous economic development coupled with the rising standard of living in recent years, more of our people have settled down in HDB flats, enjoying the amenity of life including proper sanitary and adequate water supply. The second factor being the rapid commercial and industrial development that caused rapid rise in water consumption.

In a survey recently, the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation sounded a grim warning to a serious shortage of water in the world in just another 30 years when the world's population will have doubled and the demands for water almost stripped. We are all aware that in the less industrialised countries, about 75% of the urban population live without the supply of drinking water. The remaining 25% is often supplied with unsafe or even polluted water.

We in Singapore are more fortunate that a turn of the tap we get fresh drinking water of the highest quality. It is obtainable at a reasonable price as compared with other countries in Asia and the rest of the world. Water comes to us so easily and our people have taken it for granted. Few people realise how essential it is to our daily living. How important it is to our industrial operations and vital it is to our society as a whole.

According to the PUB projections, the demand for water will rise to 166 million gallons per day in another 5 years' time. By 1980, the daily water demand will surpass 187 million gallons per day. The consumption of water is therefore steadily mounting from year to year. If we are not more careful with our water, and not to explore for more water supply, we will be confronted with water shortage in the future. As a result, our lives would be painful and miserable and will be difficult to survive. As a precautionary measure, we must all prepare to explore more water supply and to conserve our precious water.

I have pleasure now to declare this "Water is Precious" Exhibition open.