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SPEECH BY MR JIEK YUN THONG, MINISTER FOR CULTURE
 AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE TOA PAYOH BRANCH
 LIBRARY ON THURSDAY, 7 FEB 74 AT 7.30 PM (DELIVERED
 BY HAJI SHA'ARI TADIN, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
 TO THE MINISTER FOR CULTURE)

I am happy to be here this evening for the opening of the Toa Payoh Branch of the National Library. The Minister for Culture is unable to officiate at this opening ceremony, much as he would have liked to, and he has asked me to stand in for him.

One of the many good habits which Singaporeans have been urged to acquire is the habit of reading. As with many good habits, this is one that is best acquired at an early age through teaching, example and encouragement by parents, teachers and elders.

In Singapore, this task has been a major responsibility of the National Library, since its establishment in 1958. The response of our young children to the library has been a key factor in the development of the National Library's public services.

To promote the reading habit, there must be the availability of libraries which alone can provide free and easy access to the wide range of books and other reading materials. The National Library, which is centrally located in Stamford Road fulfills this basic need. The building was completed in November 1960, and has since become a familiar landmark to most, if not all, Singaporeans. But a library service needs to be available at the most convenient places possible and must function at a time when people are home from work or school. The services provided by mobile libraries and part-time branches have met this need to some extent, but there is little doubt that a full-time branch library located at one's doorstep, so to speak, has far greater advantages to offer.

The National Library's first full-time branch was opened at Queenstown in April 1970. It was conceived as the first of a number of branch libraries to be set up in all major population centres in Singapore in order to decentralise and expand the National Library's public services to their fullest extent. In 1973 the Queenstown Library lent about half a million books out of the total of 1.8 million books lent throughout the National Library system last year.

The completion of the Toa Payoh Branch Library marks yet another stage in the development of the Library's facilities. It will not only serve the reading requirements of the people of Toa Payoh, but will also serve as the headquarters of other services such as the popular mobile library service as well as service to part-time branches, and to residents' associations, social welfare homes, clubs and other institutions and associations. I understand that during the first few weeks of registration at this Branch, more than 3,500 residents enrolled as members. This is a good start and is an indicator of your interest in the reading habit.

Reading materials are so extensive and expensive these days that it is practically impossible for anyone to acquire all the books one would like to read, but these are usually available at the library. So I hope this library will be used throughout the day by students.

But students are not the only ones who will benefit from this library. There are many adults who would like to make use of the library for various reasons - for purposes of self-education, for recreation and in some cases merely to quench their thirst for knowledge. It is of interest to all of us in Singapore that we have a well-informed public and one of the ways of making this possible is through the provision of adequate libraries and adequate reading materials.

You all know the old saying that "education does not stop at school". Unfortunately, many of us tend to give up our reading habits - the source of our continuing education - once we leave school and begin to work. It is my hope therefore that this library, by providing facilities at the doorstep of residents of Toa Payoh, will be an incentive for all to renew their acquaintance with books and thus broaden their horizons of knowledge.

I now have great pleasure in declaring open the Toa Payoh Branch Library of the National Library.

DATED: FEBRUARY 7, 1974.

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