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SPEECH BY MR CHIN HARN TONG, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY,
MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS, AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF
THE VIGILANTE CORPS LIFEGUARD STATION, EAST COAST PARK
ON SUNDAY, 4 MARCH 1979 AT 10.00 AM *COAST*

Being a small island Republic, it is not surprising that aquatic pursuits are becoming increasingly popular, both for recreation and sports. Swimming, canoeing and sailing sports have become very popular; and it is the deliberate policy of the Government to cater for such needs. Public swimming pools exist in many areas, and such facilities are always incorporated, whenever feasible, in the planning of housing estate complexes. With rapid urbanisation taking place in the Republic, the Government has at the same time developed many beaches and offshore islets into public resorts. Such facilities have also necessitated the provision of more lifeguards, and in this respect the Vigilante Corps have been able to play a role.

The Vigilante Corps have always included seabound activities as part of the physical training programme. National Servicemen who choose such aquatic activities pursue these skills at swimming pools or Sea Training Centres. From the outset, the VC have realised the need to impose safety precautions, and lifeguards have always been posted on duty at such training sessions. This fact in turn has prompted the VC to train some of the National Servicemen in life-saving and lifeguard techniques. Eight qualified lifeguards were posted to each Marine Unit of 150 men. It was estimated that through this scheme, the VC would produce 16 trained lifeguards annually, and eventually have sufficient numbers to cater for its own needs *whether* VC National Servicemen were required to perform emergency duty at sea.

In 1973, the Government saw that these lifeguards within the Corps could be deployed to serve the community; the need for such personnel was dictated by the fast-expanding swimming and beach

facilities which I have mentioned earlier. Accordingly, 24 lifeguards were selected for lifeguard duties in November of that year along Changi beach to augment the Singapore Lifeguard Corps which operated there. In February 1974, the VC Lifeguard Unit was officially formed.

Whilst the Singapore Lifeguard Corps relies solely on volunteers, the VC has a constant supply of young men who can be trained to become lifeguards. The strength of qualified lifeguards now is 394 men and 10 women. Their areas of coverage have also been extended to Sentosa, East Coast Lagoon, St John's Island and now the 8-kilometre stretch of East Coast Park. In order to instil public awareness of safety precautions, the VC Lifeguard Unit has also regularly conducted demonstrations on water survival at public swimming pools.

The VC Lifeguard Unit, since its inception in 1974, has saved many lives. During the first year, VC Lifeguards attended to 19 cases and saved 17 lives; in 1975, 18 cases and saved 15 lives; 1976, 17 cases, saved 15 lives; 1977, 12 cases with no loss of lives and in 1978, 14 cases with 13 lives saved. This gives a total of 80 cases over the five-year period, or an average of 16 cases per year. The total numbers of drowning cases reported in Singapore in recent years have been declining since 1974. In that year, 103 people were drowned; followed by 99 in 1975; 85 in 1976; 38 in 1977 and some 22 last year. The need for lifeguard services therefore remains. By conducting more demonstrations on water survival and beach safety, and by providing more lifeguards on duty, the unnecessary loss of lives can be minimized even further.

This Lifeguard Station, costing almost \$120,000/- is built so that VC Lifeguards can report to and then be deployed along the whole 8-kilometre stretch of East Coast Park. The Station itself includes an up-to-date first-aid room, and has modern resuscitation equipment for more effective life-saving. A rubber dinghy powered by a 16hp engine will ensure the arrival of assistance in the shortest possible time. VC Lifeguards will also patrol the sea in canoes. In addition, six look-out Towers are constructed at regular intervals along the beach to enable the lifeguards to oversee a greater area. Such lifeguard services, although necessary, must not be taken for granted

by the general public. Swimmers, picnickers and others indulging in water activities must themselves be aware of the hazards of drowning and boating mishaps. They must also take precautions themselves, such as non-swimmers not venturing into deep waters or too far from the shore; those in rowing boats should have life jackets, and warning signs along the beaches must be heeded. Only in this way can we hope to effectively prevent any loss of lives through drowning. I take great pleasure now in declaring open this VC Lifeguard Station.
