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PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MR CHUA SIAN CHIN, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS,
AT THE SIXTH ANNUAL DINNER AND ACROBATIC SHOW
OF THE MACPHERSON ACROBATIC TROUPE AT THE MACPHERSON COMMUNITY CENTRE
ON SATURDAY, 29 JANUARY 1983 AT 8.00 PM

Dragon and Lion Dance and other forms of acrobatic troupes have traditionally been affiliated to Chinese clan, cultural and athletic associations. These associations are usually organised on the basis of dialect groups. Today as a result of urban renewal of our old city districts and shifts of population to HDB estates, these old traditional Dragon and Lion Dance troupes are dwindling in numbers.

However, we see emerging a growing number of new Dragon and Lion Dance troupes which are affiliated to very much broader based organisations which cut through dialect groups and ethnic lines such as the People's Association and the Vigilante Corps. This is a healthy development. A number of our community centres now have their own Dragon and Lion Dance Troupes. They draw their young recruits from among the youths residing in HDB neighbourhoods where the community centre is situated. It provides our youths living in HDB estates with a healthy form of recreational activities. This also helps to preserve this traditional form of performing arts with the infusion of new blood.

This was how the MacPherson Acrobatic Troupe started in 1977. It recruited youths living in the constituency and had an initial membership of 30. It started off with a Dragon Dance Troupe. It sought the permission of the Management Committee of the MacPherson Community Centre to use the centre for Dragon Dance practices. The Management Committee, however, decided that activities of the acrobatic troupe should come under its charge and be part of the overall activities of the centre.

The activities of the MacPherson Acrobatic Troupe have since expanded. It has now added Lion Dance and Stilt-walking among its activities. Its present membership stands at 128. About 70 per cent

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of the members are residents of MacPherson constituency and the ages range between 15 to 24 years.

After the formation of the MacPherson Boys' Club the Troupe trained the boys from the Club to perform in the Dragon Dance. Members of the Boys' Club have now taken over the performance of the Dragon Dance. This is most praiseworthy. It not only adds one more challenging and imaginative activity for the boys in our club but it also gives them a sense of pride of achievement to be able to perform for the community. This is a good way by which the older members of the community can show to our boys that they can also play a useful role in the community.

This is the kind of grass-root activity which cuts through the divisions between age groups, that should be encouraged in our HDB neighbourhoods. We must try to prevent not only within families but also within a community the generation gap that is occurring in Western societies. The older members must understand the younger generation who have been brought up in different circumstances in our fast changing world and show that they do care for them by way of concrete deeds. In this way they will generate understanding and gain their respect as well as affection. We can see this clearly happening from our experience of running the Boys' Club. I believe that this is the answer to eventually eradicating the problem of vandalism, juvenile crime and delinquency in our HDB neighbourhoods.

We have now formed four Boys' Clubs. The response of the boys in the neighbourhood to join the Clubs has been overwhelming. The membership of our MacPherson Boys' Club has reached nearly 1,000. The range of activities of our Clubs have been expanding. It now includes Civil Defence training to boys between the ages of 14 to 18 years who volunteer, and training in Martial Arts. With the increasing number of activities the Club needs more adult volunteers from the community to take charge of these activities. Within the constraints of the manpower available more Boys' Clubs will be formed in other areas where there is a pressing need for them. We are planning to form four more Boys' Clubs during the course of this year.

I hope other grass-roots organisations will follow the commendable example of the MacPherson Acrobatic Troupe and make the

effort of getting the boys in our neighbourhood involved in healthy and meaningful activities. In this way we can help to hasten the process of building up closely-knit and happy communities in our HDB neighbourhoods.

Finally I wish to thank you for inviting me as your guest-of-honour at your Sixth Annual Dinner and Acrobatic Show. Your Acrobatic Troupe has attained a high reputation as evidenced by the invitations you had from well-known organisations to perform at their functions. Do keep it up and I wish you even greater success in the New Year.

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