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SPEECH BY MR GOH CHOK TONG, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE  
FOR FINANCE AND MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR MARINE PARADE,  
AT THE OPENING OF MARINE PARADE BRANCH LIBRARY,  
ON FRIDAY, 10 NOVEMBER 1978, AT 6.30 PM

The National Library's first full-time branch library was opened in 1970 in Queenstown. This was followed by the Toa Payoh Branch Library in 1974. The Marine Parade Branch Library is the National Library's third full-time branch.

The opening of the Marine Parade Branch Library today is another manifestation of the National Library's policy of decentralising its services. This policy seeks to provide a library at the doorstep of the reading public in housing estates and satellite towns.

At the end of September this year, there were over 319,000 registered members in the National Library System, which, however, is a modest 13.8% of Singapore's total population. In developed countries such as Britain, USA and New Zealand, between 25-50% of the total population use a library system. In comparison with these countries, we still have a long way to catch up but, nevertheless, we have made significant strides since the 1950's when the public library served only a small English-educated group. Today, the National Library and its branches provide a wide range of services in Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English.

Today, too, ... 2/

Today, too, a library is not just a traditional storehouse for books. Social and technological changes are taking place, and the library, if it is truly to meet the needs of the people, must respond to these changes. For example, the library in Singapore must act as a catalyst for community development. It can do this by acting as a focal point where people of all age groups can meet and participate in social and educational programmes, where hobby clubs, creative writing and drama groups flourish, where special efforts are made to provide for the needs of the institutionalised, the aged, the homebound and the physically handicapped, and where non-book oriented persons can find an outlet for their talents.

Singapore is a city state where human resources are our greatest strength. Such resources must therefore be carefully and assiduously nurtured. The library can contribute to this nurturing process by being a multi-media educational, informational, cultural and recreational centre, rich not only in books but periodicals, films, tapes, records and microfilms, where debates and forums on contemporary issues are frequently held, and where the performing arts, reflecting our cultural heritage, can find expression.

Libraries play an indispensable supporting role in the educational development of a population by providing the right kind of resource materials to develop the individual capacity of each reader, especially the young. In this respect, they must not only be geared towards the voracious gifted child reader but also the slow child catching up. They must provide supportive resources to help raise the quality of education at all levels - pre-school, elementary, tertiary, professional and post-school education through life. The resources of the library must be related to the needs of the people - those who use the library and those who do not customarily turn to libraries, whether the very under-educated or the very highly educated.

I am glad to know that most of what I have described are already being carried out in the Central Library in Stamford Road and in the Queenstown and Toa Payoh Branch Libraries. The Marine Parade Branch Library will also be providing these same services which I hope residents and friends will make use of. I should like to see the Marine Parade Branch Library become a power-house of knowledge where there is interaction between readers and the library, and between readers and readers. Old and young alike should find the Branch Library a source of knowledge, and an abode of meaningful peace and recreation.

I am also pleased to reveal that in 1980 the Marine Parade Branch Library will be the first library in Singapore where listening-booth facilities for sound recordings will be accessible to the public. But this is not the ultimate in the

library of the future. In the library of the future, routine operations such as the borrowing and returning of books, the ordering and cataloguing of library materials, and the retrieval of information will be computerised; loans to other libraries will not involve originals but will be replaced by electronic copies; a complete record of the nation's publishing output will be stored on magnetic tapes; library resources will not be limited to what is available in the country but can be accessed from overseas data bases, and information can be received and viewed on a screen by people from where they are - in the library, in the classroom, in the home or in the office.

These are exciting vistas, but for the present, you are invited to make full use of the Marine Parade Branch Library which I now have great pleasure in declaring open. It will contribute to gracious living in Marine Parade.