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SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER MR GOH CHOK TONG

AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF Ngee ANN CITY

ON TUESDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 1993 AT 6.00 PM

In 1845, only 26 years after Sir Stamford Raffles founded Singapore, a group of 13 far-sighted and public-spirited Teochew merchants set up their clan association. They were led by Mr. Seah Yu Chin (She You-jing). They called their new association, the Ngee Ann Kongsì.

Like other clan associations, Ngee Ann Kongsì looked after the interests of its clan members. It helped the new migrants to settle down, found them jobs, provided financial aid and other welfare services, settled disputes and managed temples, funeral parlours and cemeteries. The Teochew forefathers brought along them the spirit of community self-help and the practice of the able helping the less able.

Ngee Ann Kongsı is a very successful clan association. Its proud history contains several lessons for us.

Firstly, it never lost sight of its mission, which is to serve the needs of its community. It is attuned to changing requirements, and responds to them accordingly.

Secondly, its daily affairs have been managed by an elected management team since 1930. Prior to this, the Kongsı was run by descendants of the founders. This change ensures managerial competence and efficiency.

Thirdly, it understands the importance of education and supports it with practical measures. Currently, it funds the Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Ngee Ann Primary School and Tuan Mong High School. It is starting a new Ngee Ann Secondary School in Tampines next year. In addition, about 200 pupils benefit from its secondary school and university bursaries every year.

Next, it knows that it must first be financially sound before it can hope to do charity. Although non-profit making in nature, it is highly commercial in its outlook and operation. Its constitution requires that 80 per cent of its annual income be set aside to fund charitable and educational institutions.

Lastly, it moves with the time. Nothing illustrates this better than this stately, handsome complex which adds value to Orchard Road and beauty to our city skyline. It houses the largest retail space in Singapore and the biggest departmental store. It also introduces two internationally renowned names, Takashimaya and Harrods, to Singapore. Ngee Ann City will raise the standard of our retail industry. It will serve not just Singaporeans but also increase the attraction of Singapore for the international traveller.

Ngee Ann City demonstrates the Kongsi's strong ability to conceptualise, plan and manage a modern operation. This is a proud achievement commensurate with the vision of the Teochew pioneers in Singapore. I congratulate the leadership of the Kongsi., and your partners, Metro and Takashimaya.

I understand that the Ngee Ann Kongsi is currently planning a Teochew Cultural Centre at its premises in Tank Road. The objective is to promote greater understanding of the Teochew arts and culture, religion and customs, and the history of its early migrants. This is a commendable project. It will help educate young Singaporeans on our humble beginning and early struggles.

In conjunction with the official opening of Ngee Ann City, Ngee Ann Kongsi has decided to donate \$1 million towards the Singapore International Foundation (SIF). The SIF serves all Singaporeans. Its objective is to expand the spirit of voluntarism and charity of our youths, by getting them to serve outside Singapore. Your generous donation, I am sure, will be greatly appreciated by SIF and its volunteers.

Ngee Ann Kongsi was launched to help the early migrants settle down in their new home in Singapore. Now, 150 years later, it is helping Singaporeans to render community service abroad, including reaching out to Singaporeans studying and working overseas, or who have settled down abroad. This is an interesting extension of the Kongsi's early objective of helping their clansmen settle down in a strange country. It is a further illustration of how the Kongsi moves with the time.

In conclusion, let me congratulate once again the Ngee Ann Kongsi, Metro and Takashimaya for the successful completion of this ambitious project. In the Ngee Ann City, the ancient name of Teochew has found its modern expression. Today is a proud and happy day for the Teochew community.

I am pleased to declare the Ngee Ann City officially open.

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