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Singapore Government

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Media Division, Ministry of Information and the Arts, 140 Hill Street #02-02 MITA Building
Singapore 179369. Tel: 837 9666

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**SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG AT THE
OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE MARINE PARADE COMMUNITY
BUILDING ON SUNDAY, 28 MAY 2000 AT 7.30 PM**

COMMUNITY CENTRES/CLUBS IN THE 21st CENTURY

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Community centres and clubs (CCs) are important social institutions in our housing estates. They are focal points where residents gather to socialise, pursue their hobbies or attend enrichment courses. In the process, the residents enhance their understanding of other cultures, and very importantly, build friendships across different races and religions.

2 Many Singaporeans take CCs for granted, and do not know that the concept of CCs is unique to Singapore. Foreign visitors are often surprised that we provide one modern community building for every 15,000 families. In their own countries, including the developed nations like Japan, the United States and the United Kingdom, there is no extensive

network of community facilities for residents' activities and interaction. Where there are community halls, they are often modest structures with basic facilities.

3 Our CCs have served Singaporeans well. In 1999 alone, our 106 CCs conducted a total of 20,000 courses and other activities for over 4 million participants.

4 However, we cannot rest on our laurels. We must continue to improve our services and facilities. We must introduce new ideas and approaches that meet the changing needs and aspirations of Singaporeans. I have told the PA to constantly ask itself this question: What must the CCs do to continue to appeal to Singaporeans?

5 Our society is evolving. Singaporeans are increasingly better educated, more affluent and more global in their outlook. The younger generation has grown up on a diet of Information Technology (IT). If CCs continue to run archaic courses and activities, they will not draw many participants.

6 Moreover, more and more Singaporeans now have access to private clubs and other recreational centres. They have little or no need to use CC facilities. This trend makes it more difficult for the PA to promote community interaction and neighbourliness.

7 Hence, CCs will have to make innovative efforts to keep up with the times, or they will gradually lose their relevance and vibrancy. We must develop a new generation of CCs to serve a new generation of Singaporeans.

CC Co-location Scheme

8 The PA is trying out many new ideas.

9 The most innovative example is the 'CC Co-location Scheme'. Under this concept, compatible organisations are invited to co-locate with a CC. This maximises land use and allows sharing of common facilities.

The presence of co-tenants also enhances the attractiveness of the CCs to residents, while the co-tenants can draw on the visitors to the CCs.

10 So far, five CCs have been built under this Scheme, amongst them, our Marine Parade Community Building [The other CCs are Bishan, Ayer Rajah, Henderson and Kampong Ubi.]. On the site of the old CC we have constructed this new 3-in-1 building of about 14,000 square metres, to house our CC, a Community Library and a non-profit theatre group, The Necessary Stage.

11 Ten more CCs will be built under this concept in the next two years [These are Braddell Heights, Bukit Gombak, Changi Simei, Nee Soon South, Pasir Ris Central, Toa Payoh Central, Toa Payoh West, Ulu Pandan, Yew Tee and Yuhua CCs.]. They include the Ulu Pandan CC, which will co-locate with six organisations, namely, National Council of Social Service, NTUC Child Care Centre, NTUC Computer Training Centre, Consumer Association of Singapore, PCF Student Care Centre and an arts group to be nominated by the National Arts Council.

Farming out Maintenance of CCs

12 Another change the PA has introduced to CCs is in the area of maintenance. The PA will gradually farm out the maintenance and housekeeping of all its modern CCs to professional consultants and specialist contractors. This will free the CC Management Committees (CCMCs) and CC staff from the usual maintenance chores. It will allow them to focus on organising programmes and activities for the residents.

'Schoolhouse By The Bay @ Katong CC'

13 The PA is also experimenting with the Marine Parade Community Development Council a new service concept. This will be pioneered at the Katong CC. The CC will be upgraded into a specialised building called 'Schoolhouse By The Bay @ Katong CC' by next year. While retaining its role as a CC, Katong CC will also specialise in children and family-related activities. It will run quality child-care, kindergarten and student

care services. The Centre will also serve as a learning laboratory for the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Singapore (AECES) to conduct training for pre-school teachers. The Association will also conduct a wide range of enrichment and education programmes for parents and children.

14 This is yet another example of how we can add value to the use of a CC by thinking out of the box.

A Virtual CC

15 Another innovation is the creation of a virtual CC. Presently, residents can register for enrichment courses and other activities at the CCs through the Internet. As a further step to serve Singaporeans in the IT age, the PA will set up a Virtual CC, or VCC in short, in the coming months.

16 The VCC will be a good way to reach out to Internet-savvy Singaporeans. It will benefit Singaporeans who are abroad. The VCC will help them to maintain links with Singapore.

17 For a start, the VCC will offer on-line continuing education courses. For example, there will be lessons conducted by famous chefs on cooking curry fish head and chicken rice, or making Malay kueh. We can even allow participants to order special ingredients from the VCC.

18 The VCC will also provide pictorial illustrations on the origins and stories of the local ethnic festivals; interesting community news; and exciting events like the annual Chingay Parade.

Annual Retreat for Community Leaders

19 I have given you some examples of how we can manage the CCs differently in the new era. The challenge for the PA and the community leaders is to continue searching for fresh ideas and approaches to improve the CCs.

20 Towards this end, every CCMC should consider organising a periodical retreat to brainstorm ideas, strategies and new initiatives. The PA can help engage a good consultant to facilitate the brainstorming session.

21 Marine Parade CCMC, for example, can focus its discussion on developing this CC into a Centre of Excellence for Performing Arts at its first retreat. This is an ambitious but achievable goal.

Conclusion

22 In conclusion, let me congratulate Marine Parade CCMC led by Mr Goh Tiam Lock; the Building Fund Committee led by Dr Loh Soo Ann; the National Library Board; and The Necessary Stage; for bringing this new concept of co-location into reality. I would also like to thank all the donors and sponsors. Without their generous support, the residents of Marine Parade would not have this magnificent building for their community activities.

23 It is now my pleasure to declare the Marine Parade Community Building officially open.

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