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SPEECH BY MR LEE YIOK SENG, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT), AT THE NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATIONS CUM VARIETY SHOW AT WOODLANDS STREET 13, WOODLANDS NEW TOWN ON SATURDAY, 22 AUGUST 1987 AT 8.00 PM

It is an honour to be here this evening to celebrate with you our National Day.

Amidst the joyous festivities, we should take some time to recall our early years as a young nation. Left to fend for herself in 1965 after a shortlived union with Malaysia, Singapore was faced with a host of social and economic problems. It was a Singapore which did not appear promising to anyone.

Yet, despite this, our nation has transformed from a dismal island of slums into a nation with one of the highest standards of living in Asia. We have indeed much to rejoice on our National Day.

Although we have done well so far, we should not rest on our past achievements. We still have a long way to go. Singaporeans must continue to upgrade and modernise in order to meet the challenges of a changing world.

The last few years have been difficult ones for some of us. For the first time in Singapore, we experienced negative growth. Our new generation of leaders have tackled the challenges head-on with a fresh approach as can be seen in the measures introduced to revitalise the economy. The people have also proven themselves able to accept sacrifices for the long-term good of the whole nation. We cannot say we have completely weathered the storm but the signs are clear - our economy is recovering.

We now have a nation we can be proud of. Today, 75 per cent of those who live in HDB flats own their own homes. By 1999, we hope to achieve the objective of having a full home-owning society. Through the HDB's building programmes, we now have new towns and housing estates distributed throughout the island. These towns are efficiently linked with a comprehensive network of roads and expressways. Soon, we will have the MRT which will make even long distances seem like only a stone's throw away. No part of the island will be too far from the city centre.

Woodlands New Town, in the northernmost part of Singapore, is now only 30 minutes from the Central Business District, thanks to the Bukit Timah Expressway. For those who commute by bus, there are six bus services at its Woodlands bus interchange which link the residents of Woodlands Town to other parts of the island. For those of you who live in Woodlands New Town, it is like owning a pocket of tranquility in our bustling city. You are indeed fortunate to be surrounded with natural and landscaped scenic features like the Town Centre, the lake and the little hills.

When Woodlands New Town is fully completed, you can pride yourselves on residing in the largest HDB New Town. There will be a total of 66,000 units in nine neighbourhoods. To date, about 22,000 flats have been completed. By the end of 1987, Neighbourhood Three will have a new Neighbourhood Centre with its own mini-market, dry market and other shopping facilities. A sports and swimming complex will be completed by mid-1988 and an indoor stadium by 1989.

Despite these distinctive advantages, the take-up rate of flats at Woodlands has been slow. This has implications in that it will now take a longer time for the completion of developments in Woodlands New Town. However, it is my hope that with the completion of additional facilities, we may see the repeat of a surge in demand for flats in Woodlands.

As I am sure you will agree with me, the HDB has put in much effort in the planning and development of the Woodlands New Town to meet the needs of the residents. However, feedback is always necessary if HDB is to further improve their planning and development skills. Only you, the residents, will be able to give the required feedback. So may I encourage you to give your useful suggestions on improvements on the facilities in your New Town to HDB. For it is only through these constant dialogues between Government agencies and Singaporeans that we are able to make Singapore a better place to live in.

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