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SPEECH BY MR LEE YIOK SENG, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
(NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT), AT THE PRESENTATION OF AWARDS TO
TO SCHOOLS WITH BEST MAINTAINED FRUIT TREES
AT THE SCHOOL OF ORNAMENTAL HORTICULTURE
ON SATURDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 1987 AT 10.00 AM

I am very happy to be here this morning to give away awards to schools with the best maintained fruit trees. This morning's simple ceremony signifies one of the Government's efforts to encourage the planting of fruit trees in Singapore.

The campaign to plant fruit trees first started in 1971. Initially, fruit trees were only planted in MINDEF camps and schools. Later, they were also planted in the grounds of Government institutions. In 1978, the planting of fruit trees were extended to the HDB housing estates. Since 1984, we have also planted fruit trees in parks and selected roads. To date, almost 100,000 fruit trees have been planted. There are about 7,300 fruit trees in school compounds.

The Government has spared no effort in planting fruit trees in public areas. The Parks & Recreation Department has an on-going programme to plant fruit trees in all public parks, wherever the locations and site conditions permit. The Kallang Riverside Park which cost \$2 million to build. and the Marina Park, costing some \$3 million, will be saturated with coconut trees to give the river bank and the beach line a tropical atmosphere. The \$15 million Pasir Ris Park will also have fruit trees as well as ornamental plants and other park facilities. In the newly developed Botanic Garden Extension, which cost \$5.3 million, some fruit trees are also planted for educational purposes.

The Primary Production Department has also contributed in the success of the fruit tree planting programme. Officers from the Department have successfully introduced superior fruit tree varieties that they had obtained from their collection overseas. These included the fragrant dwarf coconut, avocado, biriba (which tastes like custard apple) and dwarf kedongdong. You can see all these fruit trees in the Lim Chu Kang Fruit Tree Centre, and you can buy these fruit tree saplings there. I will encourage schools to organise trips to visit the Centre. I am sure the students will be delighted to see all sorts of fruits not commonly seen in the local fruit markets, and at the same time will be able to learn some new knowledge on how to better grow the fruit trees in their schools. In fact, the Primary Production Department is planning a training course for schools on the proper maintenance of fruit trees. I understand that they are in contact with the Ministry of Education on this subject.

The main purpose of planting fruit trees in schools is to inculcate a love for trees and greenery amongst our younger generation. At the same time, we hope to instill in them a sense of social discipline by learning not to pluck unripe fruits and developing an awareness of their collective responsibility to look after the trees. In the process, we hope they will also learn some horticultural knowledge. And of course they can also benefit materially from the harvest of the fruits of their labour.

Those of you who grow ornamental plants at home will know that plants in general need tender care, time and effort, besides technical know-how, for them to grow well and bloom. Fruit trees require even more attention! They need good soil, good drainage, adequate sunshine, ample fertilizing, timely applying of chemicals to control pest and disease attacks, and proper silvicultural practices like thinning, pruning etc for good development and optimum fruiting.

In many ways, the planting of fruit tree from sapling to fruiting stage is like bringing up a child from infancy to adulthood. It requires a lot of effort. We therefore think it is only proper that the Government gives due recognition to those schools which have responded enthusiastically to the fruit tree planting programme, and especially to those schools which have continuously and diligently maintained the fruit trees grown in the compounds. Maintenance work of any kind is never glamorous. It calls for dedication and a lot of hard work which never seems to get done. The judges in this competition have therefore taken all these factors into consideration. In assessing the participants, they have considered whether the school had a proper maintenance programme, whether the school had planted the right type of fruit tree in the right location, whether the fruit trees had been planted at the correct spacing, and most important of all whether the school had encouraged its students to form a gardening club or society to learn more about the maintenance of fruit trees.

We send our children to school for an education. This should consist not only of knowledge of the basic sciences and the arts, but also moral education. In this respect, we can consider fruit tree planting, maintenance and harvesting of the fruits as an appropriate and meaningful activity forming part of their moral education. The Parks & Recreation Department, assisted by the Primary Production Department have provided technical advice and support to schools in carrying out their fruit tree planting activities. These two departments have also successfully organized this competition. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the two departments and all those schools which have participated in this competition. I congratulate the winning schools and its students for their hard work and good results. Thank you.

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