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ADDRESS BY DR YEO NING HONG, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS
AND INFORMATION AND SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE (POLICY) AT
THE GROUND-BREAKING CEREMONY FOR Ngee ANN CITY AT ORCHARD
SQUARE ON TUESDAY, 18 JULY 1989 AT 10.45 AM

I am happy to be here this morning to officiate at the ground-breaking ceremony for Ngee Ann City.

The history of Ngee Ann dates back 144 years to 1845. A few prominent Teochew merchants collected funds for charitable purposes and to promote their traditional values and practices.

Ngee Ann was formally incorporated as Ngee Ann Kongsì in 1933. In addition to charitable and welfare activities, the objects of Ngee Ann include the establishment, maintenance, administration, and improvement of schools and the provision of scholarships and financial aids to students in need.

The support of education has always featured highly in the Kongsì's priority. Its first major project after formal incorporation was the establishment of Ngee Ann Girls School in River Valley Road in 1940. The school was relocated to Marine Parade in 1982 and renamed Ngee Ann Primary School. In 1953, the Kongsì took over the management of Tuan Mong School and upgraded it into a secondary school in 1955.

In 1962, the Kongsì established Ngee Ann College in Tank Road as a tertiary education institution. In 1968, the College relocated to its present campus at Clementi Road, on 100 acres of land donated by the Kongsì. In 1982, the College was upgraded and renamed Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

Presently, 75 per cent of the Kongsis' annual income is donated to Ngee Ann Polytechnic to help in its operations and development. In addition to these projects, the Kongsis also makes an annual award of 200 scholarships for studies in schools and tertiary institutions.

Our forefathers were not highly educated. Indeed many of them were illiterate. Yet they instinctively recognised the importance of education and treasured its value. They were able to look beyond monetary gains and the mere accumulation of wealth. The Kongsis' support of education is an example that is worth emulating by other corporate bodies and associations of Singapore. Our captains of industry and business can learn from our forefathers. They can learn to look beyond the bottom line, beyond the next dividend payment, beyond the next annual report. They can learn to be growers of men and women, talented men and women, well-trained and well-taught in our schools, colleges and universities.

In many developed countries, in particular the US, it is not uncommon for individual citizens, corporate citizens, and Foundations to provide endowments for schools, for professorships, for departments, and in some occasions for entire colleges and universities. Indeed some of the most prominent of universities in the world, including Stanford University, Harvard University and Rockefeller University, are private universities which began with such endowments.

As Singapore moves towards becoming a developed country, as our economy continues to grow, and as more and more companies join the billion dollar club, more of these corporate citizens should consider giving greater support to education in Singapore.

After all major corporations are the principal beneficiaries of our educational system, which provides them with well-educated and well-trained school leavers and graduates. In making such endowments, corporations will be returning in part the benefits that they have received from the State and the country. And they shall in due course reap the rewards of their generosity, through better trained entrants into the job market.

The successful development of Ngee Ann City will mean more funds available for charitable and educational activities of the Kongsì, in particular, more funds for Ngee Ann Polytechnic. When completed in 1992, Ngee Ann City will have a twin 27-storey office towers linked by a podium block of retail shops and car parks. This project will add another 66,700 sq metres of prime retail space and another 40,000 sq metres of office space to the busy Orchard Road area. This means new business and investment opportunities, for both the local and foreign investors at this prime location in Singapore.

Consistent with Ngee Ann's support for community and nation, Ngee Ann City will provide a civic plaza, a concert hall and museum. Such facilities will be available to the public for cultural, social and national events. This gesture in putting aside expensive land for community purposes can serve as a model for other developers to emulate.

The project will integrate effectively with FWD's recently announced plans to create an attractive network of walkways with ambience for pedestrians in Orchard Road and will make Orchard Road that much more attractive and pleasurable both to Singaporeans and tourists alike. Ngee Ann City will also enhance the reputation of Orchard Road as the premier shopping and tourist centre of Singapore and help enhance excellence in Singapore.

On this note, I congratulate the Ngee Ann Kongsi and Orchard Square Development Corporation for the development of Ngee Ann City. I wish them every success.

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