

22 AUG 1996

PRESS RELEASE

Release No.: 05/JUL

03B-1/96/07/03

96-44B-6

**SPEECH BY GEORGE YEO,
MINISTER FOR INFORMATION AND THE ARTS AND
MINISTER FOR HEALTH, AT THE LAUNCH OF
THE NATIONAL LIBRARY BOARD'S NEW DIRECTION AND LOGO
ON WEDNESDAY, 3 JULY 1996 AT 10.00 AM**

LIBRARIES FOR A RENAISSANCE CITY

Today marks a significant milestone in the development of library services in Singapore. The change from the National Library as a department under the Ministry of Information and The Arts (MITA) to the National Library Board (NLB) signifies not only a change in organisation, but also in philosophy and approach.

The essence of this change is embodied in the new NLB logo. The flipping pages of a stylised book express our quest for knowledge and endless learning. The transition from bold solid pages to a pixelated format depicts the historic evolution from the print media to the electronic media. The sturdy blocks represent NLB's comprehensive range of facilities and, the three pages, the three-tier structure of library services at the regional, community and neighbourhood levels.

Without the excellent staff of the National Library, without the wonderful librarians we have, we could not have gotten here and we will not be able to get to where we want to go. Their success in encouraging reading and in making available to us a remarkable range of books and other materials has laid the foundation for further progress in the years ahead. To prepare for that future, in addition to the traditional roles, the NLB will need librarians who are also expert in the new information technologies.

The Library 2000 Report, published in February 1994, identified libraries as an integral part of the advanced information infrastructure we need for the 21st century. Singaporeans will then enjoy easy access to the best information sources in the world via a network of borderless libraries. The implementation has already begun with the development of a three-tier library system - regional libraries like Tampines, community libraries like Jurong West and children's libraries in Housing and Development Board (HDB) void decks.

International statistics show per capita public library loans in Singapore to be ahead of Hong Kong but behind New York. There are cities like Helsinki and Copenhagen with library usage almost four times higher than Singapore. Because they have more libraries and better collections, the people living in those cities see libraries as essential facilities. The result is a more-educated and better-informed population. This is what we should also try to become in Singapore. We should make regular visits to libraries a part of our lives here.

Towards this end, we will be investing over six hundred million dollars in library facilities over the next eight years in capital spending alone. Including recurrent expenditure and land cost, the budget over the next eight years will be

over a billion dollars. Three new regional libraries will be built at Woodlands, Jurong East and in the new NLB Building at Victoria Street across the road from here. Another 10 community libraries will be established in different parts of Singapore. The first community library was opened in a shopping complex at Jurong West in March this year. It has been very successful. Two more will be opened in Choa Chu Kang and Cheng San early next year. In co-operation with the PAP Community Foundation, we will also proliferate children's libraries all over Singapore. Altogether, we are planning for a hundred of these children's libraries.

In addition to new libraries, we will also upgrade existing libraries. Library collections will be expanded and include videos, computers, databases, CD ROMs and Internet. We will give particular emphasis to staff recruitment, training and development. We are reviewing the career structure of librarians to make the profession more attractive. In an age of information overload, the job of the librarian in the next century will be to point us in the right direction, where to look and help concentrate the information we need, and do all this in an attractive, even entertaining, way.

The entire library service will take on a more customer-oriented approach and cater to the needs of all segments of our population - old and young, men and women, specialist and generalist. Chinese, Malay, Tamil and other language collections will be substantially increased. There will also be specialised facilities for the arts, for business, and for particular leisure interests like sports.

Like established libraries in developed countries, our libraries will also help preserve and pass on our literary heritage to future generations. A good public library system will help us become a more gracious and rounded society.

In the 21st century, the basis of all wealth and achievement will be knowledge and culture. The cities which contribute most to human civilization will be those which are best able to educate and organize their people, attract talent from all over the world, make use of available existing knowledge, originate new knowledge and apply them sensibly. Public libraries of a new kind will play a vital role in creating and sustaining such dynamic human communities. I hope our new national library system will help make Singapore such a renaissance city in the new Asia.

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