

EMBARGOED UNTIL AFTER DELIVERY
PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

SPEECH BY DR NG ENG HEN, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT THE LAUNCH OF *OF MONUMENTS AND MEMORIES*, ON WEDNESDAY, 26 MAY 2010, AT 5.15PM AT THE COMMAND HOUSE

Mr Michael Koh
Chief Executive Officer, National Heritage Board

Mr Mok Wei Wei
Deputy Chairman, Preservation of Monuments Board

Mrs Christine Ong
CEO, UBS Wealth Management

Mr Kwek Leng Joo
Managing Director, CDL

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

1. I am happy to join you today at the launch of *Of Monuments and Memories*, a special travelling exhibition organised by the Preservation of Monuments Board (PMB). This travelling exhibition, which features our nation's iconic monuments, is the first of its kind, and highlights the PMB's commitment to preserving and promoting Singapore's built heritage.

2. Appropriately, today's event is held in the Command House which is one of the National Monuments featured in the travelling exhibition. This newly gazetted monument formerly housed notable individuals including Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten and Lieutenant-General Arthur Percival, along with many other influential British military leaders and statesmen. Today, it is home to the UBS

Business University, who has taken pains to restore this historical building to its original splendour.

3. On behalf of the PMB, I would like to thank UBS for its generous support of the exhibition, as well as for hosting the launch today.

Remembering Our National Monuments

4. *Of Monuments and Memories* features stunning photographs of 27 of Singapore's National Monuments, that reveal the interesting tales behind their grand facades. Credit must be given to the dedicated group of photographers who have, through their insightful pictures, enabled us to take a fresh look at buildings we may be familiar with. On behalf of the PMB, I would like to thank Mr Kwek Leng Joo and his team for their labour of love and tribute to the community and Singapore's architectural heritage.

5. The 27 monuments were selected for their diversity and are a good representation of Singapore's rich multi-cultural heritage. For example, National Monuments that serve as places of worship such as the Al-Abrar Mosque, Armenian Church, Sri Mariamman Temple and Thian Hock Keng Temple have played pivotal roles in their respective communities by serving as focal points of network and relationship-building for citizens and immigrants alike. Their co-existence is a reflection of our harmonious society, and adds to a vibrant and bustling heritage that is uniquely Singapore.

6. Besides contributing to Singapore's history and architectural landscape, our National Monuments also bear testimony to the pioneers and leaders who have toiled selflessly to spur Singapore's rapid growth and progress over the years. The late P. Govindasamy Pillai, the philanthropist who largely financed previous renovations is one fine example. Early cultural philanthropists, Eu Tong Sen, Oei Tiong Ham, Sir Manasseh Meyer and Tan Soo Guan were also among the largest donors to the former Raffles College, now the National University of Singapore's Bukit Timah Campus.

7. *Of Monuments and Memories* will travel to schools, shopping centres and the heartlands to help members of the public appreciate these buildings that house the collective memories of our nation. Hopefully, this will imprint their heartwarming stories into the hearts and minds of Singaporeans and tourists alike.

Greater Community Involvement

8. It has been heartening to see suggestions by youths published in a local newspaper recently on possible ways to breathe life into Singapore's historical sites¹. I am glad that the PMB is taking up some of their ideas and has initiatives to better engage the young in our built heritage. The *Monument Ambassadors Programme*, introduced earlier this year, saw students from River Valley High School designing their own monument trails. Other than learning about Singapore's history and Social Studies during the 13-week training programme, the students also established a greater sense of ownership in our National Monuments. I hope that they would be

¹ "How to breathe life into S'pore historical sites", Straits Times Youthink, 26 Apr 2010

able to pass on to their school-mates the valuable knowledge gleaned. Guided tours by the young monument ambassadors, I understand, will begin next month. Do sign up and lend them your support.

9. The PMB has also been working with adult volunteer guides to provide guided tours of our National Monuments for the public starting in June. The training of both student ambassadors and volunteer guides to conduct monument trails, coupled with the travelling exhibition *Of Monuments and Memories*, are part of the PMB's integrated efforts to reach out to Singaporeans, enabling them to develop greater interest in our shared history and heritage.

Engaging Future Generations

10. Our National Monuments do provide a valuable learning opportunity, especially for our youth. Their rich history and heritage afford students a vast reservoir of memories and knowledge to tap into and to go beyond the confines of textbooks and classrooms to learn through real-world experiences. There is so much you can learn from a monument – from the tangible aspects such as its architectural features, to intangibles such as its social history and relevance to the community.

11. To further enhance the learning experience, the PMB will be launching an education kit featuring all 61 of Singapore's National Monuments, and highlighting stories of Singapore's pioneers and individuals associated with these icons. It is

designed to help educators organise trails for their students and complement the lessons and themes covered in the syllabus.

Conclusion

12. Celebrating the social history of our National Monuments and the contributions of our forefathers, will enable our children to grow up with a better understanding of our heritage and greater hopes for the future. The launch of various education initiatives by the PMB, coupled with the continued support of monument owners, will go towards enriching the knowledge we have of our National Monuments and Singapore's collective history.

13. It is now my pleasure to declare the exhibition open.

14. Thank you.