

EMBARGOED TILL DELIVERY
CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

SPEECH BY ASSOC PROF HO PENG KEE, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR LAW AND HOME AFFAIRS AT THE REAL ESTATE MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE INDUSTRY FORUM & GRADUATION OF PIONEER GROUP OF BUILDING CUSTODIANS ON TUE, 14 AUG 2007 AT 0930 HOURS

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to join you today at this graduation ceremony of the pioneer batch of Building Custodians. Just like I launched the upgrading of our security guard industry some 5 years ago, I am happy to launch this new effort today. My earnest hope is that the positive process that started 5 years ago with respect to the private security guard industry will be repeated for this Cleaning industry with today's launch which marks initial steps towards this direction.

Opportunities in an Emerging & Growing Service Industry

2. The real estate management and maintenance industry, which provides services to maintain the value and condition of buildings in Singapore, is an emerging and growing industry. The size of the industry can be gauged by statistics of the principal real estate types. There are around 7 million square metres of office space, 30 million square metres of factory space, 30,000 hotel rooms and over 1.2 million housing units. With our strong economy and associated development activities, this already immense building stock is likely to grow further. Indeed, the real estate management and maintenance industry plays an important role in Singapore's cost competitiveness by

helping to maintain a built environment that is conducive to work, abode and leisure.

Raising Skills Standards, Enhancing Image

3. The Building Custodian job re-design programme, which was introduced in February this year, seeks to extend the skills of the Cleaner to include minor repairs and replacement, for example, changing light-bulbs, clearing chokes, and custodial checking – such as reporting of pests and mosquitoes, killer litter and even building defects. From a security perspective, the work done by Building Custodians in checking and reporting on situations that can affect the health and safety of building users and residents is a value-adding service. This cost effective additional layer of checking and early detection of potential problems is especially important with older buildings and as the number of building users and residents continues to increase. Our Cleaners can now take greater pride in their work.

4. The creation of the Building Custodian job addresses the reluctance of Singaporeans to take on cleaning jobs, despite investments in mechanisation and training. Cleaning continues to be perceived as a low skilled, low wage job where only older and less educated Singaporeans undertake. So, we need to change this perception. Indeed, I am told that the multi-skilled, multi-tasking Building Custodian is now able to command a higher wages starting at \$1,000 a month compared to the \$700 to \$800 wages of a Cleaner. This in turn should help to attract Singaporeans to a job which they would normally not consider.

Opening New Doors

5. Like on-going efforts to upgrade our Security Guards, the introduction of the Building Custodian job opens new doors to those seeking a meaningful career, including those embarking on a second career, such as production operators affected by relocation of plants. I am pleased that plans are in place for continual upgrading of skills to Senior Building Custodian, Building Supervisor and beyond to facilitate lifelong learning to enhance employability.

6. I encourage those who are currently seeking employment to give serious consideration to this job which will provide stable employment and career advancement. For those of you who are already working as Cleaners, I encourage you to upgrade your skills to become a Building Custodian. NTUC and the Workforce Development Agency (WDA) support this initiative which will help you to move up the value chain in the industry.

7. I am told that all of you in this pioneer batch of Building Custodians are working for maintenance and cleaning contractors servicing institutional and residential buildings. I hope that more organisations and employers support this drive for a higher skilled and more productive workforce to provide value-added and improved service delivery. With their active support and participation, I am confident that the goals of economy, functionality, manageability and maintainability and above all, sustainability, can be realised for existing and new buildings in Singapore.

8. On this note, I wish to extend my heartiest congratulations to all Building Custodians who are graduating today. Well done.