

# Thousands gather to say 'I do' again

**1,138 couples come together to renew marriage vows, in what could be record turnout**

**Elizabeth Soh**

Clutching a red rose on stage, with his wife Joy next to him, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan renewed his marriage vows last night before about 5,220 people.

But the minister was not the only one pledging spousal love once more. He and his wife were among 1,138 couples who gathered at an open field near Commonwealth

MRT station to renew their vows. The National Day event was organised by the People's Association and brings together the Holland-Bukit Timah and Bukit Panjang wards.

The renewal of vows was meant to emphasise the importance of strong family values as building blocks of Singapore society.

"My wife and I have been married for 23 years and we have four children," said Dr Balakrishnan, Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports. "And this... is my best achievement."

Also at the event were labour chief Lim Swee Say, North West District Mayor Teo Ho Pin, Minister of State Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, and MPs

Christopher de Souza and Liang Eng Hwa.

The large turnout could well enter the Guinness Book of Records for the largest number of married couples renewing their vows at the same time. The current record, held in Ohio, stands at 1,087 couples. The Singapore Book of Records is verifying the numbers.

Among the couples last night were many who have been married for more than 45 years – longer than Singapore's independence.

"Some of these old couples have never even said the words 'I love you' before, so it's very heartwarming to see them finally express themselves," said Mr Jackie Goh, 36, the ceremony's chief solemniser.

Another record was also set for the night: a toast by more than 5,000 guests, which easily trumped the previous record of 1,430 toasters. It will go straight into the Singapore Book of Records.

Dr Balakrishnan was not the only one feeling sentimental.

Said Madam Mary Kwek, 70, who renewed her vows with her husband of 45 years: "Our feelings for each other now, and on the day of our wedding, are still as deep. But this time, it's even better because we have so many people to celebrate with us."

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PHOTO: LIANHE ZHAOBAO

**Married for 23 years, Dr Balakrishnan and his wife Joy were among those who renewed their marriage vows last night.**