

**EMBARGOED UNTIL AFTER DELIVERY**

**PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**SPEECH FOR MINISTER YAACOB IBRAHIM, MINISTER FOR INFORMATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS, AT THE OPENING OF THE SINGAPORE WRITERS FESTIVAL 2011 ON FRIDAY 21 OCTOBER 2011, 6.00 PM AT THE TRANSACTION PAVILION, SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY CAMPUS GREEN.**

Mr Philip Jeyaretnam, Chairperson of the Singapore Writers Festival Steering Committee

Ms Ginney Lim, Executive Vice-President of Corporate Communications and General Manager of SPH Foundation, Singapore Press Holdings;

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening,

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I am delighted to join all of you here today to launch the Singapore Writers Festival, the premier literary event in Singapore that celebrates the many faces of literature. We are heartened that the festival has attracted the participation of so many writers, poets, literary professionals and enthusiasts. We especially like to extend a warm welcome to our friends from overseas who have joined us for the festival.

I wish all of you a pleasant stay and hope that you would have the time to see more of Singapore.

## **The Value of Literary Arts**

2 Now into its 14<sup>th</sup> edition, the Singapore Writers Festival remains the only multi-lingual and multi-disciplinary festival in the region. Returning with the theme of *Transaction*, this year's Festival invites us to examine the importance of art in Singapore, as well as ponder on the value we place on books, literature, ideas and originality. Creative thinking is key to developing Singapore into a vibrant global city for the arts. Literary expression is also often the foundation for content creation and the presentation of ideas.

3 I am therefore very pleased that this year's Festival presents the inaugural SWF Lectures, a platform for the creative thought leaders of our time to share their ideas. This includes popular economist Steven Levitt who co-authored *Freakonomics*; award-winning author Michael Chabon whose book *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2001; as well as Man Asian Literary Prize winner for his book, *Three Sisters*, Bi Feiyu. These lectures are excellent

opportunities for Singaporeans to be inspired by the headliners in their respective fields, and to widen the shores of our knowledge.

### **Literary Arts for All Singaporeans**

4 The Singapore Writers Festival also follows a time-honoured tradition of placing literature at the heart of the community, making it an integral part of our lives. It is in this spirit that the Festival aims to fulfil the National Literary Arts Plan's twin drivers – to inspire great literature and to offer a platform to showcase inspiring literature. Far from being a privileged world of high art, the Singapore Writers Festival is a broad-based festival for all Singaporeans and our friends.

5 While the spotlight is certainly on the exceptional writing showcased from all over the world, the Festival is also about building new bridges and catering to a variety of literary interests within our community. You will have the opportunity to hear from writers from the project *PasSAGES*, who visited an old-age home and hospice to unearth personal and heartfelt stories. Taxi drivers from the National Library Board's *Taxi Sifu Reading Club* will also try their hand for the first time at storytelling to share their personal ghostly encounters. The Festival also

includes a diverse children's programme, a songwriters' showcase, panel discussions and literary readings. With a variety of events in Singapore's four official languages, there is something for everyone to enjoy.

6 At its core, the Singapore Writers Festival is not just a celebration of writers but also of you, the reader. While a writer chronicles our history and charts our future, it is the reader who ensures that these stories are heard and passed on. Hence, this year's Writers Festival aims to help a new generation of readers connect with our literary pioneers, such as through a special focus on the late playwright and theatre director Kuo Pao Kun as we approach the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his passing.

## **Conclusion** National Archives of Singapore

7 Before I end, I would like to thank all sponsors and partners of the Singapore Writers Festival. The Singapore Press Holdings deserves special mention for its sustained belief in celebrating literary appreciation and expression. All of your generous support and enthusiastic

participation has certainly contributed to the vibrancy of our local arts scene.

8 Finally, I hope all Singaporeans - young and old; students, teachers and parents; writers and would-be writers – will come forth to experience the rich offerings of the Festival, and take this opportunity to exchange ideas with literary talents from around the world. I wish you all a delightful nine days of discovery.

9 Thank you.

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