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**SPEECH BY DR TONY TAN KENG YAM DEPUTY PRIME
MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT THE GROUND-
BREAKING CEREMONY OF THE ESPLANADE - THEATRES
ON THE BAY HELD ON SUNDAY, 11 AUGUST 1996 AT 9.00 AM
AT THE RAFFLES AVENUE**

I am very happy to be here this morning to help "break new ground".

The ground-breaking ceremony for The Esplanade is a historic moment.

It marks a new milestone for Singapore, a new phase of national development with an emphasis on culture and gracious living.

The Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay is a response to the need for better facilities for the arts in Singapore.

Participation in artistic events in Singapore is growing rapidly as evidenced by attendance at the recent Festival of Arts where attendances at performances have averaged well over 80%.

With the phenomenal growth in the arts calendar over the last two decades, The Esplanade has become a necessary infrastructure.

The Esplanade will add to the inventory of performing spaces in Singapore thereby enlarging the range of artistic attractions in Singapore.

The Esplanade will set a new standard for concert and theatre-going and will be a launching pad to help bring Singapore to the forefront of the international arts scene.

The ground-breaking ceremony this morning marks a milestone in the development of The Esplanade.

The Singapore Arts Centre Company and its development team have benefited enormously from views offered by many Singaporeans and foreign friends on issues ranging from staging facilities to audience comfort to provisions for accessibility by the elderly and aged.

I would like, on behalf of the Government, Ministry of Information & the Arts and the Singapore Arts Centre Company, to thank all those who have helped in the development.

Nurturing of the arts is an important step towards making Singapore a gracious society.

In addition to making life more interesting and enriching in Singapore, cultural exchange programmes are a good way to build international relations.

Active collaboration on The Esplanade project between our local artists and architects, artists from Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, China and India and consultants from New York and London, have given the project an international character.

Hopefully, The Esplanade will help to enrich the arts in the region and enable talents from the region to work with our artists for mutual benefit.

Once again, I thank the numerous people who have helped to make this project a reality.

I congratulate the winners of the "Young at Art - Hoarding Competition".

Your enthusiasm augurs well for the future.

I hope that all of you had a memorable experience painting your dreams around The Esplanade site and will have pleasant recollections of your participation in the years to come.