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Subject: Speech by Mr Peter Ho, 11 Nov 97, 9.45 am

# Singapore Government PRESS RELEASE

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**WELCOME ADDRESS BY MR PETER HO,  
CHAIRMAN PS21 EXCEL COMMITTEE  
AND PS (DEFENCE DEVELOPMENT)  
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF  
THE 1997 PS21 PUBLIC SECTOR WITS CONVENTION  
AT THE WORLD TRADE CENTRE AUDITORIUM,  
ON TUESDAY, 11 NOVEMBER 1997 AT 9.00 AM**

It has been two and a half years since the launch of ExCEL. Since then, ExCEL has established itself as a vital part of our Public Service for the 21st Century, or PS21, movement. For those among us who may be new to PS21, ExCEL stands for **Ex**cellence through **C**ontinuous **E**nterprise and **L**earning. The acronym "ExCEL" is entirely appropriate as it captures the essence of what we are trying to do - to foster positive attitudes among public employees towards change and to create an environment that seeks continuous

improvement and learning.

2           The seeds which were sown at the launch of ExCEL in May 1995 have germinated and it is the fruits of this labour which we are here today to acknowledge.

3           The spirit of ExCEL is to energise individuals into an enterprising, thinking and enthusiastic work force, always willing and ready to try out new ideas and innovations. This is crucial to strengthening our competitive edge, in a competitive world. We therefore need to create the kind of environment that promotes creativity and encourages innovation and teamwork. Two of the mechanisms we have adopted for achieving this objective are Work Improvement Teams (WITs) and the Staff Suggestions Scheme (SSS).

4           I am pleased to note improvements in both WITs and SSS in the past year. Let me start with the SSS. To date, the total number of suggestions for the whole of the Public Sector since the launch of PS21 in 1995 is more than 1.1 million. No. of suggestions to date = FY95 + FY96 + 2nd Qtr FY97, i.e.  $331,395 + 514,049 + 260,317 = 1,105,761$ . For FY96, in particular, an average of 4.3 suggestions have been made by each Public Sector employee, an improvement of 61% over the previous year. 84% of Public Sector employees have contributed an idea in the Suggestions Scheme - this is better than the 70% achieved in FY95. We will strive to achieve close to 100% participation. This would mean that each and every person would have done his or her part in contributing an idea to improving his or her work environment or organisation.

5           As for WITs, there are altogether 8,750 WITs in the Civil Service. On average, these WITs have completed 2.2 projects in FY96, an improvement of 38% from the previous year's achievement. 95% of these WITs projects have been implemented, which really goes to show that the organisations see value in these projects. The percentage of Public Sector employees involved in WITs, either as a member, leader or facilitator, was 88%. This participation rate for WITs is 9% better than that achieved in the previous year.

6           The ministries have done very well in motivating staff to participate and contribute to WITs and SSS. However, I would like to see a leveling up of the contributions

from all departments, so that the efforts of one department are not used to offset shortfalls in another department. I'm confident that with the strong support and commitment from all the ministries and statutory boards, we will be able to face the challenges ahead with confidence.

7 Throughout the past year, I have been encouraged by the many innovative schemes employed by the ministries to spur staff into greater participation and contribution to WITs and SSS. For instance, the Ministry of Health has re-initiated the PRIME programme, the Programme for the Revitalisation of Mature Employees - a due recognition of the fact that the Singapore work force is becoming more and more "mature". The Ministry of Education's idea of an Academic Excellence Team (or "AET") to get more academic staff involved in WITs is also noteworthy.

8 We would also like to see ministries organise forums where good ideas can be exchanged with one another as this helps to minimise the duplication of effort and makes more efficient use of resources. This WITs Convention that we are opening today is but one such fora. In addition, I would like to commend the Ministry of Communications for organising a WITs Xchange seminar in August this year - a lead which other ministries can follow.

9 As it is important for ideas to be exchanged with one another, it is also important that good ideas ought to be communicated widely. Therefore, there is a need for a system to highlight these ideas quickly across all levels so that the benefits derived from these ideas could be shared.

10 The "Challenge" newsletter, published by the PS21 Office, is one means of disseminating good ideas quickly to everyone in the ministries and statutory boards. This newsletter has been receiving positive feedback. Now with "Challenge" also published on the Internet, more people can benefit from these ideas at their convenience. More importantly, the Internet version of "Challenge" allows for greater flexibility in terms of how the information could be organised and searched.

11 Another way of disseminating ideas quickly is by pulling them into some sort of

a data bank, which is then made accessible to everyone - like MTI's IDEA BANK and MINDEF's DATAWITS. MINDEF's DATAWITS database is a repository of good suggestions and WITs projects. When fully implemented, the vast number of good ideas (366,824 suggestions and 12,323 projects in FY96) generated each year in MINDEF and the SAF would be made available to all in the ministry. There is definitely scope for a Public Sector-wide database, like DATAWITS, to be established in future.

12 Another major focus area for the ExCEL committee is in Training. The ExCEL Committee aims to promote an environment where people are encouraged to learn. This is in line with the government's objective of enhancing the skills level of the population in order to ensure the competitiveness of the work force. Training and re-training is, therefore, a life-long endeavour, necessary to equip our work force in this fast-changing environment. In this regard, I'm pleased to note that the Public Sector is on track towards meeting the government's Year 2000 training target of 100 training hours per person per year. We have chalked up a creditable 52 training hours per person in FY96, better than the target of 40 training hours per person for that FY.

13 Each and every Public Sector employee must take a personal responsibility towards enhancing his knowledge and skill so that he will always be of value to the organisation he works for. As such, systems must be put in place to ensure that our people are getting adequate training - at all levels of the organisation - so that we will be a more effective and efficient Public Service, capable of bringing Singapore confidently into the next millennium.

14 I would like to bring your attention specifically to the progress we have made in the development of Training Road Maps. The Training Road Map is a tool we employ to ensure that every staff has a personalised training plan. This will be agreed between him and his supervisor at the start of each work year. It also ensures that the supervisor has the responsibility to ensure that his staff attend the relevant courses. To date Figures from FY96, about 70% of the staff in all ministries have had their Training Road Maps worked out for them and 77% have been trained. All these indicate the tremendous effort that the ministries have put in to train their staff at all levels. "Core training" for all civil servants should

include subjects such as National Education and WITs and SSS as they would give staff a firm foundation for their career in the Public Service.

15        However, we need to realise that using the Training Road Maps mechanism is just the organisation's way of contributing to the development of the individual. It is necessary for the individuals to want to learn and upgrade their skills. They must take the initiative to train themselves and learn from each other. And, they must increasingly learn to work in teams as this will yield tremendous returns for the organisation. Only when the individuals and organisations are in the same mindset, that is, to recognise that training is important, can we realise the ExCEL Committee's goal of developing a culture of continuous learning.

16        Based on the progress made, it seems that the ministries are now more settled in their WITs and SSS movement. We're also picking up speed in developing Training Road Maps for our staff, probably the most critical component of the new training system we're putting in place. More exchanges of ideas across ministries have also helped spurred the development of the people into a thinking and innovative work force.

17        Looking back, therefore, it has certainly been an eventful year for the PS21 ExCEL Committee. However, we must guard against complacency. It is my sincere wish that we strive our best in nurturing an attitude of service excellence in meeting the needs of the public with high levels of quality and courtesy - ideals of PS21 when it first started in 1995.

18        To conclude, I would like to emphasize three points. First, targets are important for any organisation to achieve the goals it has set out for itself. Organisations must therefore set challenging targets for themselves and communicate these to their staff, motivating them to meet, and exceed, the targets along the way. Second, there must be on-going management emphasis to energise the individuals in the organisation to constantly want to improve themselves and their work environment. It cannot be a one-off campaign, soon-to-be-forgotten once the curtains fall, but a continuing effort. And, third, management must place value in the contributions of their staff so as to motivate them to giving off their

best. If we put our minds to it, we can achieve all these. I'm confident that we will.

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