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Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by Minister Lim Boon Heng, 21 Mar 1999 at 7.30pm

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MR LIM BOON HENG, MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO AND CHAIRMAN, PRODUCTIVITY
AND STANDARDS BOARD, AT THE PSB STAFF DINNER ON SUNDAY, 21 MAR 1999 AT RAFFLES
BALLROOM ROOM, WESTIN STAMFORD HOTEL AT 7.30 PM

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Members of the PSB Board of Directors

Colleagues in PSB

Ladies and gentlemen

Good evening.

1. Since our last D&D, many new challenges have cropped up as the financial
turmoil in the region turned into an economic crisis. All of us in PSB have not
been spared the impact. We have all felt the effects in our work, and on the
personal level, our participation in the national cost cutting effort.

2. Let us look back at what we have done. Earlier this month, we released our second annual report, and PSB's performance in the last fiscal year was publicised in the media. You may have already read the report, but the key points are worth highlighting again.

3. Looking at the key indicators, we have reason to be proud of our performance. With the support from our partners like NTUC, SNEF and other government agencies, we have made good progress in working towards our five mission goals. PSB's aim is to sustain the nation's Total Factor Productivity growth through innovation and quality.

To achieve this, our workforce needs to be equipped with the skills that meet market demand and remain relevant and employable. It is heartening to note that, to date, almost 150,000 workers have undergone on-the-job training and another 5,000 have been trained through the BacktoWork programme. Our workers continue to participate actively in quality circles and work improvement teams. After 18 years of the Productivity Movement, the total participation rate is now 9.9% of the workforce, the highest in the world. These are just some results which show that we have the makings of a world-class workforce that constantly upgrades its skills and strives for productivity improvements.

4. PSB also plays a major role in building up a world-class industry. Going by the key indicators, we are on course. A number of organisations have embarked on the journey to business excellence. To date, PSB has issued over 1,000 ISO certificates. More than 100 have joined the ranks of the Singapore Quality Class since its launch in 1997. For SME development, PSB has rendered assistance on five fronts – namely, access to financing, human resource development, information and IT, technology and innovation, and market access. The results are very impressive. Nearly 170 promising local enterprises have been developed. So far, PSB has facilitated the formation of 68 franchises and economic groupings in 36 trades involving 707 franchisees and economic grouping members. Some 4,400 businesses have been registered in SGConnect, which has recorded some 8.5 million hits.

5. Despite the economic slowdown, there was no slowdown in training activities. SDF total grant commitment in FY 98 was about \$75 million, an increase from \$72 million in FY 96. The ratio of one training place for every three workers in the workforce was sustained. Training for older workers was also sustained, at around 90,000 places. These key statistics show that the development of our workforce is heading in the right direction.

6. We can congratulate ourselves that we have done well, thanks to the hard work put in by all of you. As we forge ahead, we will face many uncertainties. But we can take comfort in the fact that we have laid a solid foundation. What we need now is to set our sights on bringing the workforce and industry to the next lap of the journey to excellence. In the knowledge-based economy, information and knowledge will be the competitive edge. Our workforce must, therefore, be a thinking workforce that continually seeks innovative best practices and apply new technology creatively to raise productivity. And PSB must be a stronger organisation to carry out its mission effectively in helping the workforce and industry.

7. We are all familiar with the saying: "instead of giving fish to the hungry, teach them how to fish". We've often heard this saying when people talk about helping someone. By teaching them the right method, it ensures that they can continue to survive on their own. But what about the teacher? Can he catch any fish himself? Does he keep teaching the same way of catching fish? Or should he look at new ways of catching fish, venture into deeper waters, even go beyond fish and introduce a seafood cocktail that also includes prawns, crabs and shellfish?

8. In many ways, we are like the fishing expert. To be a fishing expert, first, we must have good knowledge. Knowledge about the product – the fish, where to find them, their habits and what they feed on. Knowledge about the tools of the trade – how to navigate the boat, cast the net, keep the fish fresh and bring it to market. And knowledge about the environment – the weather, the waters, and how to avoid dangerous rocks and currents. The point I am making is this – as the agency helping to build up a world-class workforce and world-class industry, we ourselves must strive to become world-class. We must not only be a fishing expert; we must be a world-class fishing expert.

9. Second, we must have good skills to put our knowledge to good use. Third, with so many things to take care of, we must have good teamwork. We cannot work as individuals, but as a team. We can then each be an expert in our respective area, and collectively be a team of experts in many areas. Fourth, as we look beyond our immediate waters, we will find other fishing experts. They may operate in different waters, use other methods, catch different fish, or serve a different market. We can learn from them and work with them to widen our network, literally. Or we can bring them into our team. This is not a new concept for PSB. Employing foreign talent has been the practice of PSB and its predecessors, well before the current debate on foreign talent. PSB believes in forming the best team to provide the best service to industry and to workers.

10. We administer the Singapore Quality Award. We know what it takes to be world-class. We exhort organisations to strive for excellence. We help them to put systems in place.

We should, therefore, set a good example for all organisations to emulate. I am glad that we have come a long way towards SQA since the conception of this goal. When we started the journey, I understand we had an SQC score of less than 300. Tonight, I am pleased to announce that we have joined the ranks of the SQC, with a score of 463. My congratulations to all of you. With an extra ounce of effort from each and every one in PSB, I'm sure the goal of being worthy of the SQA in 2002 is within our reach.

11. To help us put our resolve into concrete actions, let me outline some suggestions. First, as the national agency promoting quality circles and the suggestion scheme, we should be a shining example of high employee involvement in QCs and the suggestion scheme. Second, as the agency promoting the People Developer Standard, we should be a People Developer ourselves. Third, as the national standards body, we should use products that conform to national and international standards, such as standardised paper sizes, standardised formats for presentations and standardised sizes for publications. Fourth, as the national certification body, we should be ISO 9000 and ISO 14000 certified. Finally, as the national productivity authority, we should strive to continuously improve our efficiency and ability to add value, using the same, or better still, fewer resources. The BPR

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exercise last year helped us to focus on eliminating inefficient and outdated processes, using the systems thinking approach. These are just a few suggestions. I am sure you can think of many more areas where we can put into practice what we preach.

12. As an organisation promoting a thinking workforce in a knowledge-based economy, it is important for us to have this mindset of "always striving to do more with less". This is embodied in the PSB 5A-star corporate values – Achievement, Adventure, Affiliation, Accountability and Acknowledgement. They were developed to guide all PSB officers in our daily work and in dealings with colleagues, customers and other external parties. Corporate development was, and continues to be, an important organisational activity.

13. We may have the most advanced fishing boat, with state-of-the-art navigation equipment, but if the fishing expert does not know how to use them, he will not catch any fish. A world-class fishing expert is able to acquire and manage information about the fish, the waters, the winds and the weather; and assimilate new knowledge into his mental databank. He is able to apply his knowledge and skills to capitalise on the prevailing wind and weather conditions. He also looks at how other fishing experts work, benchmark against best practices and seek to improve himself. Where opportunities present themselves, he will exchange information and experiences and forge alliances with other fishing experts to derive mutual benefits.

14. I have shared with you some thoughts on how we can work to help not only others but ourselves. A thinking workforce, learning organisations and a knowledge-driven economy are not just about being clever. It is about how cleverly we make use of what we know and what we can do to achieve the best possible results. In each of our own areas of work, we can be thinking workers. We can constantly learn new things and seek new ways of doing things.

When we have this spirit of life-long learning and innovation, we can be world-class fishing experts who will chart new waters and, who knows, maybe discover new lands to conquer.

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Thank you.