

Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY DR OW CHIN HOCK, MINISTER OF STATE

(FOREIGN AFFAIRS) AT THE 1999 NATIONAL DAY OBSERVANCE CEREMONY ON WEDNESDAY, 11 AUGUST 1999 AT 10.25AM AT

TIBS ANG MO KIO DEPOT

Mr Tan Hup Foi, Managing Director of Trans-Island Bus Services Ltd and
Singapore Shuttle Bus (Pte) Ltd,

Representatives of NTWU, TIBS Taxi Operators Association,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my pleasure to join you this morning to celebrate our 34th National Day. PM has released the economic growth rate forecast for this year to be between 4 and 5%. Our economy is recovering. If the economic recovery can be sustained and that our country again enjoys steady growth, we should realise that high growth of the pre-1997 period is over. Indeed, competition in the 21st Century would be keener, both from lower-cost neighbours and technologically more advanced countries.

We have to now look beyond the current economic performance and set our eyes beyond the horizon at the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. We must ensure that our economy remains competitive and find a niche in the global economy, and that our

people continue to enjoy success and prosperity in the 21st Century.

2 In the 21st Century, however, talent, innovation and higher productivity will be the key to our success. First, we must maximise the talent of all Singaporeans and raise productivity of our employees. Our Government is committed to developing each and every Singaporean to his fullest potential, through education and lifelong learning. The Government is reviewing Singapore's education system to ensure that every child will be computer literate, and to nurture thinking and creative skills in the younger generation. The Government has also pledged \$220m to the Skills Redevelopment programme to help our workers learn new skills, find new jobs and raise their productivity.

3 Second, for Singapore to succeed in the 21st Century, we must also attract foreign talents too, as Singapore is a small country with an indigenous population of about 3 million. Our population base is too small to generate a large pool of local talents. We must tap the best talents from around the world to complement our local talents. We need foreign talents to help us grow the economy, create jobs through their investments, expertise, experience, and linkages, and help us strengthen our international competitiveness. Attracting foreign talents is indeed to protect the interests of Singaporeans.

4 The transport sector is an important sector in our economy. It contributes a substantial proportion of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP); it also supports the movement of people, goods, and equipment. Indeed, the government released the White Paper on World Class Land Transport System in 1996. Trans-Island Bus Service (TIBS), Singapore Shuttle Bus (Pte) Ltd, and TIBS taxi operators, are key players in the transport industry and you should all work together to help move towards the goal of a World Class Land transport industry.

5 TIBS has moved in several directions. First, TIBS has spared no efforts in investing in modern city buses with many safety and passenger-friendly features like Electronic Destination Signs, extra wide doors and low boarding steps for the comfort and safety of its customers as well as ensuring that its staff are well trained to provide reliable, courteous and efficient service. It will help to encourage more people to take public transport, and meet their higher expectations for public transport service.

6 Second, TIBS is committed to train and upgrade the skills and development of its staff. Last year, 2.5% of its payroll was spent on staff training, achieving an average training of 79.8 hours per employee, which was significantly higher than the national average of 31.5 hours.

7 Third, TIBS has a strong productivity movement. Because of its efforts, TIBS has been awarded two out of 18 National Productivity Awards. In total, it has produced eight National Productivity Award winners in 11 years. My congratulations to TIBS for their commitment to productivity. Recently, both Trans-Island Bus Services Ltd and TIBS Motors Pte Ltd have also received the Service Quality Class Award, striving for world class excellence. This also attests to TIBS' commitment to provide excellent service.

8 Fourth, TIBS is working closely together with SMRT to become the first multi-modal transport operator in Singapore. Such a move will help to serve the needs of Singapore as we move into the 21st Century and it will make travel on public transport more convenient, seamless and easier-to-use.

9 All the efforts and development by your company are consistent and supportive of the future success of the transport service sector and our economy. However, the effort and development of your company will not be successful without the employees' full support and co-operation. Whether you are a bus driver, taxi driver, technician, or other non-driving staff, each has a key role to play. Bringing commuters to their destination safely and on time, maintaining vehicles in tip-top condition, ensuring service quality and gaining customers' satisfaction - all contribute to your company's operation and to our economy.

10 We will be moving into the 21st Century in 4 months' time. The new millennium will bring new challenges. It will also bring new opportunities. Let us build on what we have achieved, continue to work together at the macro level, as well as at the industry and company level, and build the best home for our families and future generation. We can make the difference.

11 May I wish you a happy National Day. Thank you.

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