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Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY DR LEE BOON YANG

MINISTER FOR MANPOWER AND

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR JALAN BESAR GRC

AT THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE SUNDAY MARKET

AT WELD ROAD, LITTLE INDIA

ON SUNDAY, 3 OCTOBER 1999, 7.00PM

AT JALAN BESAR NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICE POST

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Your Excellencies, the High Commissioner of the Republic of India, and the High Commissioner of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Minister Counsellor, High Commission of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka,

Grassroots Leaders,

Distinguished guests,

Good evening.

1 Singapore plays host to more than 450,000 foreign workers. A large number of such work permit holders work in the marine and construction industries. Most of these workers come from the Indian sub-continent. Hence Little India, with its many Indian shops, restaurants, temples and mosques, became a natural attraction to these workers. It has served as a familiar landmark and meeting place for many foreign workers during their off day.

2 Police has estimated that every Sunday, up to 40,000 foreign workers from the Indian sub-continent converge on Little India. This poses a tremendous problem to the residents in Little India. They face problems of road congestion, littering, noise and obstruction.

3 Last year, the Police, working with nearby community organisations, set out to provide alternative venues for these foreign workers to congregate on their rest day. The vacant plots of land at Weld Road proved to be ideal for this purpose. It would provide some relief to the residents of Zhujiao and Rowell Estates by drawing some foreign workers away from their overcrowded neighbourhoods. The idea was first tried out in November last year and it had grown into a Sunday Market at Weld Road.

4 When the Sunday Market was started last year, it attracted only small crowds of about 150 foreign workers each Sunday. The crowds have since grown to about 1000 on Sunday. We expect the crowd to increase as news spread by word-of-mouth, and as the facilities and attractions are further improved.

5 The success of the Sunday Market was due to the extensive support by many Government agencies, community and grassroots bodies as well as trade and private organisations. These agencies and organisations had contributed much effort to set up this Sunday Market.

.. For instance, the Land Office, the Urban Redevelopment Authority and the Housing and Development Board granted permission for the use of the vacant land. The plots of land have been levelled and service facilities were erected by the members of the Singapore Contractors Association Limited (SCAL). SCAL also sponsored free movie screening on Sundays. This has proved to be an attractive feature.

.. The Hindu Endowments Board provided guidance on the setting up of ethnic-flavoured stalls to cater to the needs of the foreign workers in Little India.

.. The Ministry of the Environment provided numerous mobile toilets at Weld Road and elsewhere at Little India for the convenience of the foreign workers. SingTel had installed 20 additional public phones, also for the foreign workers' convenience.

.. The Land Transport Authority authorised private bus operators to provide additional transport services to bring the foreign workers to and from Little India on Sundays. This alleviates the load on public buses serving the area.

.. Police closed the roads at and around Weld Road on Sundays from 5pm to 10pm to turn it into a pedestrian mall.

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6 I would like to commend the Working Group under the Chairmanship of the Police, for organising this Sunday Market. It will alleviate the problem of overcrowding in the nearby residential estates. The residents will find some relief when more foreign workers find their way to the Sunday Market, instead of their void decks and sidewalks. However, the success of the Sunday Market will depend on continued support and co-operation of all parties, including the foreign workers.

7 Foreign workers have contributed to the strong growth of our economy in the past years, and will continue to do so in the years to come. We appreciate the contributions of the foreign workers and we have their welfare at heart. The Sunday Market is a small gesture to make their stay in Singapore more pleasant. I also wish to remind all employers that they should not neglect the social and recreational needs of their foreign workers. They come from far away to work for you. Apart from paying them fair wages, you should also look after their welfare so that they can enjoy a happy and productive stay in Singapore.

8 Finally, I want to thank the members of the Working Group for making the Sunday Market a success. This success is a testimony to the collaboration by Government agencies, grassroots bodies and private organisations in solving a localised community problem. It will help to minimise the problems we face from having such a large population of foreign workers.

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