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Subject: (EMBARGOED) Speech by Mr Lee Yock Suan, 9 Mar 2000

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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**PREPARED TEXT OF SPEECH BY MR LEE YOCK SUAN,
MINISTER FOR INFORMATION & THE ARTS,
ON THE COMPLETION OF THE RENAISSANCE CITY REPORT,
TO BE DELIVERED IN PARLIAMENT ON 9 MARCH 2000**

THE Renaissance City REPORT

PM Goh promised more funds to promote the arts at his National Day Rally Speech last year. PM announced then that MITA was developing a vision for Singapore to be a renaissance city.

2 I am pleased to inform Members that the Report articulating this vision and proposing the strategic direction to guide our promotion of culture and the arts has been completed. This “Renaissance City Report” is available on the MITA website from today and a printed version will also be available soon.

3 The last comprehensive overview of our arts and cultural scene was in 1989, by the Advisory Council on Culture and The Arts. That report laid the foundation for the burst of cultural activities that we witnessed in the 1990s. It led to the creation of institutions like the National Arts Council and the National Heritage Board and paved the way for investments in infrastructure like the Singapore Art

National Archives of Singapore

Museum, the Asian Civilisation Museum and The Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay.

4 It has been a decade since the Advisory Council's report. It is timely to review the progress made so far and set the direction for the future development of culture and the arts, in the context of our overall national development. MITA consulted with members of the cultural community to gather inputs and views. The resulting Renaissance City Report has been accepted by the Government.

5 The Report has two aims. First, it is to establish Singapore as a global city of the arts. We want to position Singapore as a key city in Asia and as one of the cultural centres in the world. The idea is to be one of the top cities in the world to live, work and play in. Where there is an environment conducive to knowledge-based industries and talent. Where Singaporeans can be creative and well-rounded individuals.

6 Second, it is to provide cultural ballast in our nation-building efforts. In order to strengthen Singaporeans' sense of national identity and belonging, we need to inculcate an appreciation of our artistic and cultural heritage. We need to strengthen the Singapore Heartbeat through the creation and sharing of Singapore stories, be it in theatre, dance, music, literature, film or the visual arts.

Vision

7 The need to articulate a vision came about because we wanted to explain how culture and the arts can contribute to the national picture and how they can enhance individual lives.

8 We asked ourselves what kind of society we wanted Singapore to have. How do we want to position Singapore in the international context? And what part does culture and the arts play in all of this? The result was a vision that is described at the level of the individual, the society and the nation.

9 At the level of the individual, we envisage a Singaporean who is well-rounded, has an inquiring and creative mind, a passion for life, and is a civic-minded active citizen. He appreciates and cherishes his heritage. His graciousness

is underpinned by a fine sense of aesthetics.

10 At the societal level, our Asian heritage is enhanced even as we evolve a Singaporean identity. We encourage and reward experimentation and innovation, whether in the arts, in technology or in business. Culture and the arts are mobilised to animate and add character to our city.

11 In the international arena, Singapore is an active international citizen with a reputation for being dynamic and vibrant. The “Made in Singapore” label is known for technologically advanced, aesthetically designed and creatively packaged products and services. Our arts and cultural scene helps to project a positive and well-rounded image of Singapore internationally.

12 We have used the term “renaissance” to embody the wide and diverse range of attributes that I have just described. This is by no means a desire to hark back to the post-medieval days of European Renaissance. Rather, it is the spirit of creativity, innovation and multi-disciplinary learning and of socio-economic, intellectual and cultural vibrancy that we want to help create. In the era of the knowledge-based economy, such qualities take on an added imperative because they contribute to innovation, imagination and the creation of new knowledge – key inputs in the future economy.

13 A vibrant arts and cultural scene and this renaissance spirit are mutually reinforcing. It can give us that creative buzz and stimulate our minds to think outside the box. At the same time, it enlarges our leisure options and makes Singapore an attractive place for talent. Our culture and heritage also help to define who we are as a people, thereby strengthening our shared perspectives and our sense of belonging.

Strategies

14 To develop our arts and cultural scene, the Report has adopted these two approaches:

15 Firstly, to nurture audiences with a deep appreciation for the arts and keen sense of aesthetics. Nurturing audiences and expanding our capacity for culture

require a long-term and sustained approach in arts education and outreach, particularly among our young.

16 Secondly, to attract, develop and support both local and overseas creative talents. This would include support for the process of art-making and investment in programmes that will contribute to the creative scene in Singapore.

17 MITA will pursue six strategies. They are:

18 One. Develop a strong arts and cultural base. This involves enthusing Singaporeans with an interest in culture, particularly through arts education programmes, and supporting study and research in our arts and heritage.

19 Two. Develop major arts companies. Such companies are driven by artistic vision and leadership, produce work of consistently high quality, and are managed by a core of full-time artistic and administrative personnel. They are dedicated to nurturing new works, new talent and new audiences. Currently, only the Singapore Symphony Orchestra and the Singapore Chinese Orchestra receive a level of support that allows them to focus on raising their levels of professionalism and producing works of an international standard that Singapore can be proud of. The Report's main recommendation in financial terms is that a substantial amount of additional funding be made available to support and groom up to eight more of such companies.

20 Three. Recognise and groom talent. This calls for initiatives to discover, groom and recognise promising artistic talents that can contribute to the arts and cultural scene in Singapore.

21 Four. Provide good infrastructure and facilities. The provision and maintenance of good infrastructure will continue to be an important factor in supporting culture and the arts.

22 Five. Go international. In order for Singapore to be a cultural centre in a globalised world, we must promote our arts and heritage in the international arena and encourage international collaboration between Singapore and overseas talent.

23 Six. Develop what we call an arts and cultural ‘renaissance’ economy. We need to invest in programmes that will add to the excitement and attraction of our cultural scene, and do this in such a way that positions Singapore as an international city of culture.

Funding

24 MITA has projected that we will need additional funding of \$50 million over the next five years. The Government has generally accepted the recommendations in the Report and is prepared to provide the additional funds. A few of the recommendations, particularly those relating to tax incentives, would however require further study before they can be considered for implementation. This sum of \$50 million is over and above existing Government arts funding. It is not inclusive of capital and operating expenditure for infrastructure projects for which funding will be separately considered.

25 Our expenditure on arts and culture is below those of Hong Kong, UK and Australia. On a per capita basis, government operating expenditure on the arts in Singapore, which is currently about \$7, is about half that of the state of Victoria in Australia, and less than a third that of Hong Kong. The additional \$50 million over 5 years will raise our per capita operating expenditure to about \$10. While still modest compared to the levels of funding in more developed countries, it is an important step in the right direction.

26 Over the next few months, MITA and its agencies will implement the recommendations in collaboration with our partners in the cultural community.
