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Subject: (Amended) (Embargoed) Speech by Acting PM Lee Hsien Loong, 10 Apr 2000, 6 pm

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

Media Division, Ministry of Information and the Arts, #36-00 PSA Building, 460 Alexandra Road, Singapore 119963. Tel: 3757794/5

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AMENDED SPEECH

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ACTING PM LEE HSIEN LOONG' S SPEECH AT JOINT OPENING OF SINGAPORE EXPO AND FOOD & HOTEL ASIA 2000 ON 10 APRIL 2000 AT 6 P.M. AT THE SINGAPORE EXPO SITE (CHANGI)

Your Excellencies
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

National Archives of Singapore

1. I am very happy to be here tonight for the opening for the Singapore Expo.
2. The exhibition industry in Singapore has come a long way from its humble beginnings in the 1970s. Back then, we had no proper exhibition facilities. Fairs were often held in make-shift booths at hotel carparks, and in the halls beneath the National Stadium. Only small meetings and exhibitions were held here, attracting some 10,000 participants per year.

3. In the 1970s, the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) and the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), then known as the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board, came up with the idea of converting two standard PSA warehouses into exhibition halls. This project led to the World Trade Centre (WTC) Exhibition Complex, which was opened in 1978.

4. Since then, the exhibition industry has seen dramatic growth. The WTC Exhibition Complex was a tremendous success. By the mid-1990s, Singapore was hosting more than 100 exhibitions every year, which attracted more than 200,000 overseas exhibitors and visitors. Singapore gained international recognition as a premier exhibition venue in Asia. We have a stable of major regional and international events anchored here, including Asian Aerospace, ComdexAsia, Commu-nicAsia, and Food & Hotel Asia. The Union of International Associations has ranked Singapore as the top convention city in Asia for the last 16 years, and currently, sixth in the world.

5. This happy outcome did not come about by chance. The PSA, STB, Trade Development Board and other agencies have actively marketed Singapore overseas as the venue of choice for exhibitions and conferences, and attracted new major events to be staged here. The local industry has shown enterprise and creativity in staging and promoting our own local shows, some of which have become internationally renowned, like Asian Aerospace.

6. With rapid growth, it became obvious by the mid-1990s that we would need better, bigger facilities. Major shows were out-growing existing exhibition facilities and had to resort to temporary tents or to dividing the show into separate venues. The Government also had plans to redevelop the WTC Exhibition Complex site for other purposes.

7. In 1996, therefore, the Government decided to invest in a mega exhibition centre to put in place the infrastructure necessary to support the next phase of the industry's development. The result is the Singapore Expo.

8. With 60,000 square metres of contiguous column-free indoor space and 15,000 square metres of outdoor space, the Singapore Expo is the largest exhibition centre in the region. It is fully equipped with state-of-the-art exhibition and conference facilities. Some 90 trade and consumer exhibitions, out of which 75 are international, will be held at the centre this year,

attracting an estimated total of well over 1 million visitors. Work is underway to extend the east MRT line from Tanah Merah station to the Singapore Expo by 2001. This will make the centre even more accessible to visitors.

9. The Government will continue to promote the exhibition industry. It is a significant source of tourism revenue for Singapore. The Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions or “MICE” sector brings in up to 400,000 overseas visitors annually. These visitors spend on average three times as much as other tourists.

10. The benefit of developing Singapore into a premier exhibition city goes beyond tourism revenue. It puts us on the world map as a cosmo-politan city, a focal point where people come together from all over the world to exchange ideas, network and do business.

11. The Food and Hotel Asia 2000 exhibition, which opens here tomorrow, is a good example. Bringing together some 2,500 participants from 67 countries and showcasing the latest products in the food and hospitality sectors, FHA2000 is expected to attract 16,000 overseas and 28,000 local visitors. I am sure that the participants will find the exhibition fruitful and valuable.

12. The international exhibition industry looks set for further growth in the years to come. With the Singapore Expo, we now have the infra-structure and supporting systems in place to ride the wave. Our credible track record and the experience we have built up over the years gives me confidence that we can develop Singapore into a major exhibition city, not only in Asia, but globally.

13. It gives me great pleasure now to declare the Singapore Expo and FHA 2000 officially open.

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