

# *Singapore Government*

## ***MEDIA RELEASE***

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### **EMBARGOED UNTIL AFTER DELIVERY**

**SPEECH BY MR WONG KAN SENG, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS  
AND CHAIRMAN OF COUNCIL OF ADVISORS, NATIONAL  
TRANSPORT WORKERS' UNION AT THE NATIONAL DAY  
OBSERVANCE CEREMONY AT DELGRO CORPORATION (DELGRO)  
ON THURSDAY, 10 AUGUST 2000 AT 10.00 AM AT 205 BRADDELL  
ROAD**

I am pleased to join you this morning to celebrate our 35th National Day. Singapore is one year older as a nation. We continue to make progress in all fields. Our economy has grown strongly in the first half of this year. At this rate of economic growth, a partial restoration of the cut in CPF contribution rate can be realised in January next year.

2 Singapore's success is not a matter of chance. We are a small country without natural resources except some three million people. The multi-racial and multi-religious make up of our population does not form a nation naturally. Our economy is dependent on external markets. On the map, we are just a dot and

could easily be missed by tourists if not for our airport, tourism and convention infrastructure. Some Singaporeans believe that it is easier for Singapore to do well because it is small. If small size is the reason why Singapore succeeds, then all countries smaller than Singapore should do well, if not better. Is this the case? But we know that there are bigger countries with larger population and richer resources which became independent at about the same time as Singapore have not progressed very far since their independence.

3 Singapore has achieved much because we have a strong leadership and a good government. The Government is forward-looking, anticipates change, plans and builds for the future. It constantly sees problems with a long-term perspective and nips the problems in the bud before they grow, even if the solutions are not popular.

4 For example, the Government made it compulsory for Singaporeans to save for their old age through the Central Provident Fund (CPF) scheme. The contribution rates were raised from time to time, when the economy was doing well and workers were receiving pay increases. Many Singaporeans were cynical at first. However, over the years, the CPF scheme has evolved into a comprehensive saving scheme providing Singaporeans with a social security net to meet their needs in old age, housing and healthcare. Because of the CPF scheme, most Singaporeans are now able to buy their own homes and have adequate medical coverage. Without foresight and good planning, many of our citizens would not have enjoyed such benefits today.

5 In many countries, corruption is common. This is not the case in Singapore. Our public service is clean and efficient. The Government is known for its toughness in dealing with corruption. Political scientists and development experts

would tell you this is not an easy thing to do. Only a strong leadership and a good government can create and maintain this environment.

6 Many Singaporeans have taken for granted how we have achieved what we have today. Very often, it would take Singaporeans who travel abroad to see the bad consequences of poor governance elsewhere for them to realise and understand better what we have in Singapore. Therefore, let us not take for granted the most important quality which sets Singapore apart from other countries.

7 Except for some years, Singapore's economic growth rate has been high. Many countries have such growth rate too, but the benefits are not equitably shared by all citizens. However, the results of Singapore's economic growth are widely shared by Singaporeans through better income, higher home ownership, quality education, accessible healthcare and personal safety from crime and other ills of a highly-urbanised society.

8 Some people have claimed that the Government had failed to bridge the income gap of Singaporeans. They felt that the divide would lead to social instability. But throughout human history, the gap between the rich and poor exists. It has never been eradicated by any government anywhere. The important thing is that while the best are well rewarded for their efforts, the Government also look after those who are left behind by having many assistance schemes, and working with the community through many helping hands. Singapore now has a large middle-class and very few people are without their own homes. The Government has provided opportunities for everyone, regardless of his socio-economic background to move up the social ladder. When there is surplus in good years, it is shared. The pool of beneficiaries of national prosperity is constantly enlarged through schemes such as CPF top-ups and HDB's upgrading projects.

9 But being a small country, we have to be nimble to adapt to changes. This is not unlike what your company, Delgro, and you have been doing all these years to stay relevant and profitable. From the humble former Singapore Bus Service Limited (SBS), Delgro has today grown into a multi-business company with international operations. It has expanded its interests to other transport related businesses like taxi services, car rental and leasing, leisure transportation, engineering businesses and rail operations. Last year, it won the contract to operate the Northeast MRT line and the Sengkang and Punggol LRT systems.

10 More importantly, Delgro has introduced new ways of operating its buses. In the old days, two persons - a driver and a ticket conductor operated a single bus. Nowadays, one driver single-handedly operated the bus with automated ticketing. Many buses are double-deckers or stretched types to carry more passengers. The company has used modern technology such as the voice announcement system and the wireless bus guide to enhance its services. Productivity and profit margin have improved. The output value per worker has gone up. Workers have benefited as a result. There are now fewer breakdowns and accidents on the road. The number of complaints received has dropped, indicating a higher customer satisfaction. Like the achievements of Singapore, the transformation of the old SBS into the Delgro of today has come about because of the leadership of its management team and the co-operation and support of the workers like you. I congratulate all of you for your achievement.

11 I wish all of you a happy 35th National Day. Let us stay cohesive and work together to do even better for Singapore, for ourselves and our children.

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National Archives of Singapore