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**SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER MR LEE KUAN YEW AT**  
**THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE SINGAPORE MRT SYSTEM**  
**ON 12 MAR AT THE WESTIN STAMFORD & WESTIN PLAZA**

When we decided to go ahead with the MRT in May 1982, our original target date for the completion of the entire system was 1992. It was an ambitious programme. But as the international economy continued to show weakness in 1984, I proposed that the construction program be accelerated, to take advantage of the world-wide keen competition for construction projects. After careful consideration, the MRTTC told me that it could be done. They then aimed for the complete construction of the system in 1990, seven years after groundbreaking in October 1983.

We have and are making a large capital investment of over \$5 billion. Therefore, the system must be put to use as soon as possible. When the five stations from Yio Chu Kang to Toa Payoh were ready, the system was started on 7 November last year. This served two purposes - first, it enabled the public to try

out and familiarise themselves with the system; and second, it enabled the SMRT to sort out teething problems. The problems and faults which surfaced were analysed and put right. Then the second stage of nine stations from Novena to Outram Park was opened on 12 December 1987 to relieve the usual traffic congestion in Orchard Road and the city centre during the festive seasons of Christmas and Lunar New Year. The system was tested under heavy crowd conditions, similar to crowds during peak hours when the whole system is operational. A maximum of up to 270,000 passengers trips were made daily during the Christmas period. The staff are now more confident of dealing with system faults under such heavy demands.

Six more stations from Tiong Bahru to Clementi are now ready. This official opening marks the completion of Phase I and IA. More commuters living along the northern and western corridors of the MRT can now travel in speed and comfort to the city centre.

It is worth restating the rationale behind our decision to build the MRT.

We have only a limited amount of land on which to house our people, build factories, hospitals, roads and schools, and train the SAF. Therefore, we decided to give top priority to investments in public transport, and to put private transport in second place. We do not have the land to allow an unlimited growth of private

cars. This means that we must put the MRT to optimal use, and the bus services must dovetail and complement the MRT. We must also keep improving the bus and taxi services and keep the growth of cars to moderate levels.

As soon as the ticketing equipment has been tested and proven in other countries, the MRT and bus services will be integrated. Our aim is a convenient, efficient and comprehensive system of public transportation. The Government has decided to lease the entire system to the Singapore MRT Limited for a nominal fees, so that MRT fares can be kept as low as possible.

In a few years, after 1990, when the whole MRT system will be operational, travel and dress styles in Singapore will undergo a change. With air-conditioned MRT rides which are swift, convenient, and comfortable, people are likely to want and be prepared to pay for a bus service to match an air-

conditioned MRT. Many may have forgotten what it was like when unreliable, uncomfortable buses, taxis, and pirate taxis jostled for space on the streets with private cars. The turning point in public transport was in December 1971 when the bus services of the major bus company, the Singapore Traction Company, broke down. The Government had to intervene to reorganise the bus services. Then we had to give buses priority in special bus lanes. But there were limits to what we can do to clear the passenger loads at peak hours. Hence, the MRT.

The challenge to the SMRT is to operate the system efficiently and effectively, providing commuters with a service that they want, at a price they can afford.

My congratulations to all who have worked on this project. It is a job well done.

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