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SPEECH BY MR ONG TENG CHEONG, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND LABOUR, AT THE INAUGURATION OF TRANS-ISLAND BUS SERVICES (PTE) LTD (TIBS), AT ANSON ROAD BUS TERMINAL ON SUNDAY, 3 APRIL 1983 AT 8.15 AM

Almost two years ago to the day, Government embarked on a new direction in public transport policy. It called for the setting up of a second major bus company. The thinking behind this move was that since SBS had firmly established itself as the backbone of our public transport system, the time had come to re-introduce some measure of competition. Only this time the competition would be quite different from the kind of competition that existed in the 60s and early 70s.

Many of our older citizens will remember that in those days, competition between the 11 bus companies was fraught with chaos and of no benefit to commuters. Routes were badly planned and poorly coordinated. Duplication was rampant on lucrative routes with few companies willing to run the unprofitable ones. Direct point-to-point service was uncommon and commuters often had to make several transfers even on short trips in poorly maintained buses. Not surprisingly, illegal pirate taxis did a roaring trade, and almost led to the collapse of the public transport system. A drastic reorganisation was necessary to save the public transport system. To this end, merger of all bus companies was the only workable solution.

Much has been achieved by SBS since it was established in 1973 to take over the responsibility of running our public transport as one unified system. Conditions today are vastly improved. The public transport system has been consolidated. It is responsive to changes

in travel habits. Buses are bigger, newer and less pollutive. There are much fewer breakdowns. In short, we now have a public transport system which is comparable to the best in the world.

It is against this backdrop that competition between two well-managed bus companies, competing on equal terms is desirable. Each company will act as a natural impetus to enhance the performance and efficiency of the other in the spirit of healthy competition and in the process help bring about a better level of service.

TIBS has been established in the remarkably short time of one year from the time it was granted a licence. I congratulate the management of TIBS on their achievement.

What is also gratifying is that despite being competitors, SBS and TIBS have shown that where the larger public interest is concerned cooperation and teamwork are not incompatible with competition. I am referring to the agreement between the two companies to recognise each other's montnly passes. This includes those held by SBS shareholders. I hope that this spirit of cooperation will continue in other ways so that at the end of the day we can all be the beneficiaries to a better quality of public transport.

It is now my pleasure to inaugurate our second bus company, TIBS, and to wish it every success.

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