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SPEECH BY MR TEH CHEANG WAN, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT AT THE OPENING OF THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN
INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS 1982 CONVENTION AT THE
MANDARIN BALLROOM, MANDARIN HOTEL ON MONDAY 14 JUNE 82
AT 10.00 A.M.

It gives me great pleasure to be here this morning to open the 1982 Convention of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, the first to be held outside Australia.

Geographically, Australia is a neighbour of Asia. Historical links between Australia and Asia, in particular ASEAN, were developed only after the Second World War. Before the war, with exception of Thailand, the other ASEAN countries were governed by the British, the Dutch or the US. Contacts between the peoples of Asia and Australia were minimal. The small number of Asian students, who went overseas for studies, invariably attended universities in Europe and America. After the Second World War, the Australian Government threw open the doors of its universities and colleges to students from Asia. Many Asians entered Australian universities as private students or under the sponsorship of the Australian Government through the Colombo Plan Assistance Scheme. Mutual awareness and interest consequently sprang up with the flow of students from Asia to Australia. Over the years, this interest blossomed into warm ties as the students returned to their homes equipped not only with education and training but also a knowledge of Australia and its people.

In monetary terms, the assistance extended by Australia in training and educating Asians is not very much. However, the benefits reaped have been enormous though unquantifiable. By opening its educational facilities, the Australian Government has in fact helped Asian countries to train much-needed professionals in many fields. This has contributed in no small measure to the

economic and physical development of various Asian countries. A good example is Singapore's public housing programme which has in the space of 20 years succeeded in housing 70 per cent of the population of the island. The success of this programme owes much to Australia though this may no doubt astonish many Australians and Singaporeans. The majority of architects and engineers who planned and implemented the housing programme during the 1960s and early 70s, has been trained in Australian institutions of higher learning. Today, the upper echelons of Singapore's Housing and Development Board (HDB) are occupied by many Australian-trained professionals. Large numbers of senior positions in the public and private sectors of Singapore, are held by graduates trained in Australia.

As an Australian graduate myself, I personally feel rather sad that the Australian Government has in the last few years, substantially reduced or almost stopped the intake of undergraduate students from Singapore. With fewer Singaporeans graduating from Australian universities, the warm feelings for Australia may slowly be eroded. The close ties which have bonded Singapore and Australia since the last World War may not be sustained. I for one would be very sorry if this were to happen.

In fact, the provision of educational facilities to Singapore students by Australia does not just benefit Singapore as the recipient country. Australia also benefits as the donor. For example, the few Senior Primary Production Officers trained in Australia have helped to facilitate the import of agricultural products from Australia to Singapore at the value of \$477 million in 1980 and \$487 million in 1981. The HDB recently awarded a contract for prefabricated housing worth \$600 million to an Australian contracting firm. The HDB has no hesitation in awarding this contract despite its substantial value. This is because as graduates of Australian universities, the Chairman and the Chief Executive Officer of the HDB have full confidence in the technical expertise of Australian builders. In another instance, the Resources Development Corporation, a wholly Government-owned company, whose Chairman is also Australian-trained, recently awarded a contract estimated at \$50 million to another Australian firm for the operation of a granite quarry.

These large Australian contractors currently working in Singapore are relatively new and therefore have not yet adapted to the Singapore system of contractual practice. I have been told by the Resources Development Corporation that their Australian contractor has already submitted several claims against them when the contract has hardly begun. In Singapore, very few contractors have serious disputes with their principals. Most disagreements are amicably settled and there is rarely any need to go for arbitration. In the last 20 years, the HDB has awarded thousands of contracts to build 400,000 units of public housing. There has not been a single case of arbitration among these contracts. I have no doubt that Australian contractors will soon learn the Singapore system of contractual practice which is founded upon co-operation among all parties concerned rather than confrontation, disputes and arbitration.

Singapore and Australia are two countries of extreme contrast. Singapore, a city state of 640 square kilometres and a population of 2.4 million, is one of the most densely populated areas in the world. Australia, on the other hand, is a scarcely populated country blessed with abundant natural resources. Twelve thousand times the size of Singapore, it has a population only six times that of Singapore. Superficially, the two countries appear to have nothing in common. A closer examination, however, reveals basic similarities. Australia has 85 per cent of its population living in towns and cities. Like Singapore, it is one of the most highly urbanised countries in the world. Therefore, Australians and Singaporeans probably face many similar problems. Architects and town planners in Singapore face at all times the constraint of a small finite supply of 640 square kilometres of land - home for 2.4 million people at present and 3.5 to 4 million in 50 years' time. In the Australian cities, the options for architects and planners are not as restricted. However, in both countries, architects and planners have to solve common problems such as that of transportation and traffic congestion, the design of energy efficient buildings and the improvement of the urban environment.

Technological advances in communications have dissolved physical barriers everywhere. New ideas, technology and developments can be disseminated and exchanged with ease. The theme chosen for this Convention "The International Architect" underscores a point which becomes more evident everyday: that the world is a single entity and that no one country or town or city exists in isolation.

I now have pleasure in declaring the 1982 R.I.A. Convention open and I wish you all success in your deliberations.