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**SPEECH BY DR TONY TAN KENG YAM,
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE,
AT THE GROUND-BREAKING CEREMONY
FOR BUKIT PANJANG LIGHT RAPID TRANSIT (LRT)
HELD ON FRIDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 1996 AT 9.00 AM**

I am delighted to be here this morning to officiate at the ground-breaking ceremony of the Bukit Panjang LRT.

Five years ago when the Government announced that we would build a Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) line to Woodlands, the residents of Bukit Panjang asked for an extension to their town. The transport planners studied the request, but the proposal was not feasible. Nevertheless, the Government promised the residents of Bukit Panjang that we would explore alternative means to meet their transport needs.

Today, the Government is delivering on its promise. Bukit Panjang will be the first new town in Singapore to enjoy the modern service of a Light Rapid Transit (LRT) system.

Many of you here today will have seen the exhibition on the Bukit Panjang LRT held in April this year at Raffles City and are thus aware of what the LRT has to offer. You have also played an important role in the selection of the design for the trains and stations. When the LRT is completed in a few years time, you can expect a smooth, fast and comfortable ride through the town. It will bring people of the town closer together. The LRT will also provide a reliable and seamless connection to the MRT, thus bringing Bukit Panjang closer to the rest of Singapore.

Today's ground breaking ceremony is a joyous occasion for Bukit Panjang residents. But it is more than that. We are witnessing not just the building of our first LRT, but also the beginning of a new era of public transport, an era where rail transport will play an increasingly important role in the transportation system of Singapore.

The Government has declared in the White Paper on Land Transport that the Land Transport Authority (LTA) will provide Singaporeans with a world class land transport system. This is a long term objective which will take time to achieve. But you can be assured that the Government will deliver on its promises. Components of the overall plan will be implemented over time with clear benefits for all.

One of the most immediate tasks for LTA is to expand the rail network. We would have a more comprehensive coverage of rail when we complete our 160 km rail network from our current 83 km. A significant portion of the network would be neighbourhood LRT systems. Even as we stand here to mark the commencement

of work on the first LRT project, studies are being conducted on the feasibility of implementing more LRTs in other parts of Singapore.

The Prime Minister recently announced an exciting vision for Punggol to be integrated by an LRT. This will take some time. Meanwhile, I am pleased to announce that the government has decided to build a second LRT system for the new Sengkang Housing and Development Board (HDB) estate, a town south of Punggol where development has commenced.

The Sengkang LRT will complement the North-East MRT Line which will serve the town centre. The LRT cum MRT will offer a ride to Orchard Road in about 35 minutes from Sengkang, comparable to the travel time by car but at a fraction of the cost.

Sengkang has been chosen for the second LRT project because it is a totally new estate. Unlike existing estates, our transport and town planners will not be constrained by existing developments. The design and alignment of the LRT can thus be better integrated with the town's planning and developments. This offers many exciting possibilities. Integrating the transport infrastructure with town planning will allow better use of land and enhance the accessibility and convenience of public transport for residents.

For example, the LRT alignment does not need to run along the road and be detached from residential developments. Where appropriate, the LRT can hug the side of the road and pass through HDB precincts with stations located nearer residential blocks. This will reduce the walking time for residents.

Some residents may not need to leave their precincts to catch a train. The LRT will bring them speedily to the MRT station where they can continue their journey to other parts of Singapore. Our concept is to bring public transport nearer the doorstep of residents. Then they need no longer have to worry about inclement weather or road conditions. An exhibition featuring the Sengkang LRT will be held later this year after the details have been finalised.

The Bukit Panjang LRT project is a landmark project which will set the pace and benchmark for future LRTs. The LTA and the consortium developing this project -- ABB Daimler Benz of Germany, Gammon of Hong Kong and Keppel Corporation of Singapore -- have an important task on their hands. They have to deliver the LRT on time and in best condition possible. But to do this, they will need the understanding and support of the residents as the construction work will be carried out nearer their doorsteps and this may pose some inconvenience. It is only through close co-operation between the parties involved and strong communal support that we can make this project a success, as we have done in earlier MRT projects.

Let me conclude by wishing all of you the best as we look forward to the successful completion of the Bukit Panjang LRT.

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