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SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

OPENING OF THE SINGAPORE PROFESSIONAL CENTRE
CONVENTION 1975 "TOWARDS A BETTER SINGAPORE"

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Singapore Conference Hall
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1 The Convention here today proposes to discuss the topic "Towards A Better Singapore". To my mind, a better Singapore must be reflected in terms of the quality of life as enjoyed by our people and the adequacy and efficiency of our social services. These must depend on the state of health of our economy.

2 As a result of careful planning and perseverance over the last 15 years, our economy is in a state of relative good health in spite of the current recession. The reserves that we have accumulated from the good years has enabled us to invest into the establishment of a relatively sophisticated infrastructure and to provide for an efficient social service. Therefore, in the context of present day Singapore, the concept of a better Singapore should be reflected in terms of our capability to improve the quality of life. Only through placing our economy on a sound footing could we afford the resources to maintain an efficient social service and to achieve higher standard of living.

3 In the sixties our main preoccupation was the building of a solid foundation upon which the economy may re-generate and expand. We had also to build up our defence not only to safeguard our national integrity but also to foster a stable climate under which our economy may flourish. The economy was fortunately buoyant and as a result we were able to divert resources towards the improvement of social services. These were reflected in the expansion of our education programme, improvement in our medical services, low cost housing programme for the masses and better enforcement of law and order.

4 Having achieved a position of relative affluence as a result of sustained economic growth over a decade then we embarked on programmes to promote a gracious living for the people. Towards this end, a number of measures including environmental control and social habits were undertaken.

5 The Government has taken the initiative to foster a gracious living for the people, it rests with all of us to cultivate the correct values for the fulfilment of our cultural and social aspirations. It is also the responsibility of everyone to inculcate a higher sense of social responsibility and discipline to preserve and enhance the facilities established for their benefit and enjoyment and to guard against wanton destruction of such facilities by vandals.

6 The role of professionals in the development of a better Singapore is therefore to take the lead in promoting a higher order of social behaviour and in promoting the economic well being of the nation.

7 I have touched on the former aspect on various occasions, it will suffice for me to say that as professionals occupying influential positions, you are better educated and equipped to play this role by presenting yourselves as shining examples for others to emulate.

8 As for the latter, this is an era of rapidly changing technology where professionals assume a greater significance in economic development. Hence, in fostering economic growth, you should strive to upgrade your expertise through more daring adoption and application of modern technology and venturing into the innovation of new technology rather than relying solely and complacently on what is established and perhaps even out-moded.

9 Present day problems are inevitably of a multidisciplinary nature, professionals should look into ways and means by which their varied expertise may be effectively co-ordinated towards solving such problems. In particular, I am thinking of professional consultancy services wherein consultants of related disciplines should converge to offer their services collectively in contrast to the existing practice where consultants generally prefer to operate in isolation. I believe that in bringing yourselves together in this manner you will find your collective resources will afford you the strength to compete more effectively in undertaking multidisciplinary projects both locally and overseas.

10 On the question of group practice, I must say I am rather disturbed by the ease in which partnerships of local professionals are being broken up, be they architects, doctors, or engineers. During this period of recession and thus lower professional activities, we would expect our professional groups would have taken the opportunity to consolidate their operations; but instead, many have been fragmented. Unless our professionals can learn to work as a group, they will never be able to compete in a position of strength against the well established foreign firms even on home ground. It is easy to attribute this to our cultural background whereby it is ungentlemanly to enter into a rigid partnership arrangement right from the beginning which leads to disagreement at a later stage. I believe there is more to it than that. I would therefore like to suggest that the Singapore Professional Centre commission a study into this phenomenon and into the ways and means by which more effective group practice can be established.

11 This brings me to the question of the role of the Singapore Professional Centre. The Centre should strive towards providing a forum to stimulate cross fertilisation of ideas through interdisciplinary discussions with the aim of upgrading professionalism and expertise not only to better service the public but also to support the concept of developing Singapore as a service centre. In particular, the Centre should strive in assisting professional groups and the Government in identifying means and ways to export professional services to the South-East Asian region and perhaps even to the world beyond.

12 The other area in which the Centre could perform an effective role is to mobilise its multi-disciplinary expertise towards the identification and solution of national problems. Here, the Centre could directly tackle such problems on its own or it could seek the support of its member groups in providing assistance to Government bodies or institutions of higher learning in the solution of such problems.

13 In conclusion, I would like to wish you the very best in your discussions and hope that your deliberations will reveal further measures that may be undertaken to promote a better Singapore. I now declare the Convention open.