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Subject: (EMBARGOED) Speech by Mr Lee Eik Teng, 11 Nov 97, 9.45 am

Singapore Government PRESS RELEASE

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**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY MR LEE EK TIENG, HEAD OF CIVIL SERVICE,
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE
1997 PS21 PUBLIC SECTOR WITS CONVENTION
WORLD TRADE CENTRE AUDITORIUM
TUESDAY, 11 NOVEMBER 1997, 9.45 AM**

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The annual WITs convention is an important event where public officers come together to give due recognition to the tremendous efforts put in by all players in the WITs movement. It is also a time to renew our energies and be inspired by the experiences of WITs teams from all public organisations.

2 The theme of this year's Convention, "WITs' The Way", is a simple but clear reflection of what the WITs movement means to the public sector. I am pleased to note that 245 teams, a 63% increase over last year's figure, are participating in this Convention. Indeed, the movement is very much an integral part of the public service culture since its inception in the early 80s, fanning the spirit of innovation and fostering camaraderie and teamwork. It has brought about a firm conviction by the individual staff that his ideas count - to his colleagues, to his immediate work unit and to the organisation as a whole. This has already created a significant impact over the years - better services to the public, cost savings and enhanced problem-solving skills of the workforce, to name only a few.

3 I am happy that many Ministries have made great strides in nurturing the spirit of ExCEL, or Excellence through Continuous Enterprise and Learning, which has WITs, Staff Suggestion Scheme and Training as its core elements. For instance, the Ministry of Defence, winner of this year's Creative Effort Award, has operationalised the meaning of quality service to the various arms of the SAF. With inputs from senior commanders, Quality Service Leaflets which define quality in clear action statements were produced and widely disseminated to their men. The Ministry of Home Affairs, one of the recipients of the Most Improved Ministry Award, has institutionalised WITs by associating every post in the organisational structure with a WITs appointment. At the Ministry of Labour, a recipient of Creative Effort (Merit Award), focus was given to making staff see strong management support of WITs and their Staff Suggestion Scheme.

4 Although we have come a long way, there is still much to learn and to achieve.

ExCEL can only succeed if management, the persons at the helm of each organisation, believe in the movement. The staff need to know and be convinced that all their efforts do in fact make a difference to their work, and that the organisation recognises these efforts.

5 WITs, Staff Suggestion Schemes and Training are at the heart of PS21. Let me briefly elaborate on each of them, starting with WITs.

WITS

6 How do I ensure that the Work Improvement Teams in my department get my full support? If I am a team member, I listen to the ideas of the others in my team. My desire is to encourage them by supporting their ideas. I should also make sure that I have a firm grasp of the thinking tools involved in WITs so that I can fully contribute.

7 Supervisors should also help WITs grow by setting aside time for them to meet and encouraging them to work on problems that are central to the department's mission.

8 Training is essential for WITs to work. In fact, without the necessary skills, not only will time be wasted but members may quickly become disillusioned. There is nothing worse than a Work Improvement Team which meets regularly to face a particular problem but without the skills to deal with it. Training prevents this, as it gives us the confidence and the skills to solve problems systematically.

STAFF SUGGESTION SCHEME

9 The next key element is the Staff Suggestion Scheme. Here, the supervisors have a special role to play. They have more of an opportunity to impact their work environment than any other member of the staff. Only when supervisors evaluate suggestions quickly and give positive comments, will their staff know that they have the respect and sponsorship of their supervisors.

10 Supervisors should remember that suggestions are made to bring about improvement. If a suggestion is accepted, it must be implemented in good time. Even if it is not accepted, the supervisor must explain the reasons and, where possible, help the staff improve on his suggestion until it is practical enough to be put into action.

TRAINING

11 Lastly, training. PS21 is about an attitude of self-development and the development of others. Supervisors should be responsible to help officers get the necessary training in order to be well-equipped for their jobs.

12 We in the civil service are committed to training. We have even institutionalised the 'need' of our officers to receive training; those of you who were here last year will remember that we launched the target of every officer receiving at least 100 hours of training a year. That means about one day a month.

13 As a Public Service, we undertake not just to learn but to plan to learn. Training Roadmaps which we continually update throughout the year signify supervisors'

interest in developing their staff. Supervisors sit down with their staff a few times each year to discuss their officers' work and what training would be of use.

CONCLUSION

14 Let me conclude with this invitation to you to keep up your wholehearted commitment to WITs, Staff Suggestion Scheme and Training. I am confident that with your committed response, the Civil Service will achieve the target of being a world-class civil service.

15 It leaves me now to extend my best wishes to all the participating teams, and my congratulations to the recipients of the various Awards to be presented today. Let me also express my appreciation to the Ministry of Community Development for hosting this year's Convention.

16 Thank you.
