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Subject: [EMBARGOED] Speech by PM Goh Chok Tong, 20 Nov 99, 10.30am

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG AT THE MODEL WORKERS AWARD 1999
PRESENTATION CEREMONY ON SATURDAY 20 NOVEMBER 1999 AT 10.30 AM AT THE ORCHID COUNTRY
CLUB

We introduced the Model Workers Award three years ago. The purpose is not only to recognize model workers in the various sectors of our economy. It is also to show our appreciation to workers in general. Many of us take their dedication to duty for granted. In the past three years, we have recognized workers in the public transport, environment and healthcare sectors. Today's ceremony is dedicated to airport and seaport workers. They have all played a big part to put us on the world map of sea and air transportation.

2 Changi Airport is a world-class airport while PSA is the world's busiest container port. These are indeed significant achievements for a small country, where it takes less than an hour to travel from one end of the island to the other. So far, this year, Changi Airport has collected 13 awards from various international

publications and organizations. Especially significant is the "Best Airport in the World" award by British Traveller magazine. Changi Airport has won this award for the 12th consecutive year. PSA Corporation was voted the Best Terminal Operator in Asia by Cargo News Asia earlier this year. Singapore was the world's busiest container port last year. The seaport and airport have truly become icons of Singapore efficiency.

3 But beyond making us feel proud, these achievements are crucial to Singapore's economic competitiveness. Our manufacturers can ship their goods to any corner of the world very quickly because of the large number of ships sailing out of Singapore. Everyday, three ships sail to the US and five to Europe. Therefore, our manufacturers have an edge over companies in other countries where goods have to wait for days for shipment because there are fewer ships calling at their ports. Similarly, businessmen and tourists find it very convenient to fly to and from Singapore because Changi Airport is well served by more than 3,000 flights per week to cities all over the world. Our economy will be crippled without the contributions of Changi Airport and PSA.

4 Changi Airport and PSA have done well because of good policies, planning and people like yourself. You turn policies and planning into a reality. It is your hard work and dedication that make all of us proud of our airport and seaport. I am sure that the selection committee did not have an easy time selecting 100 model workers from the thousands of good workers in our seaport and airport. Therefore, through the 100 winners, we are paying tribute to the entire seaport and airport workforce.

5 We have achieved high standards of performance but we cannot be complacent. Other airports and seaports also aspire to be number one. It is a logical and legitimate aspiration. Becoming number one is easy, some may say; the tough part is staying there.

6 Seaports and airports around us are getting bigger and better. Neighbouring countries have more land than us to build their seaports and airports. They can buy the same equipment that we use. They can charge lower rates because they have cheaper land and labour whereas Singapore can only rely on the skills and efficiency of its people to give us the competitive edge. While management must plan for the long term, our workers have to continue to play their part. Our workers have to continually upgrade their skills if Singapore is to stay ahead of its competitors. They must continuously seek to creatively use those skills in their work. It is only with a skilled, disciplined and adaptable workforce that our seaport and airport can respond quickly to changes.

7 It is not difficult for our competitors to follow what we do. Not long after Changi airport put in connection points in the transit lounge for business travellers to link up to the Internet with their laptops, other regional airports did the same thing. Hence, we must continuously think of new and better ideas to improve our seaport and airport, to stay one step ahead of others.

8 Sim Kee Boon, the former Chairman of CAAS, used to tell airport staff that it was everyone's responsibility to ensure that Changi "does not have a single broken tile". What he meant was that our workers had to set high standards for

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themselves and take pride and responsibility for the entire work process. If they saw a problem in their workplace, it was their responsibility to fix it immediately. They cannot shrug their shoulders and say it is not their problem. Even a single broken tile mattered to the reputation of the airport. We have Work Improvement Teams (WITS) and Quality Circles to encourage our staff to suggest improvements to the work process. PSA staff have saved PSA \$19 million over the last six years with their suggestions. A WITS team in CAAS implemented a simple idea to improve the quality of water at the airport, saving the airport more than half a million dollars a year.

9 We also have to be open and learn from others. I am therefore pleased that the 100 model workers will receive a 5-day study visit to Hong Kong to observe the operations of their very efficient seaport and airport. At the same time, I hope you will have the chance to enjoy yourself in Hong Kong and have a well-deserved holiday.

10 While we pursue efficiency, we must not forget the human element. The world-class facilities and clock-work efficiency at the airport and seaport must be matched by warm hospitality. For example, our workers at the airport have to be warm and friendly because they are the first Singaporean faces that a tired foreign traveller sees when he gets off the plane. They are also the last to be seen when the traveller leaves Singapore. For transit passengers, airport faces and service may be the only impression that they have of Singapore. Hence you are Singapore's face and image. You have to give these travellers a good impression so that they will come back, that we are both efficient and warm. Similarly, the safe shipping, transfer and delivery of cargo and goods is in the hands of seaport workers. Manufacturers and suppliers put the safety of their goods and trust in your hands. You must continue to do a good job so that they will keep coming back.

11 In conclusion, I congratulate all the winners today. You have performed your job in an outstanding manner and deserve public recognition. Through your dedication, skills and good work, I hope you will inspire others to follow your example. We are all proud of you.

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