

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

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Speech by Inche Othman Wok, Minister for Social Affairs, at the Opening of the Singapore Hyatt Hotel on Saturday, 2nd October, 1971 at 3.00 pm.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

It is, I think, a reflection of the confidence in Singapore and its future that explains this recent rapid rise in not only the economy as a whole but in the numbers of business organisations and activities of a big and sophisticated nature as in the case of our hotels. Here we have seen the coming into being in less than five years of so many of them and, more importantly the big, if not the biggest, of internationally-reputed names in the industry. And now, the Hyatt in Singapore is part of this trend, the Hyatt itself having gone international recently but very impressively in having in its three years of international operation already about 65 Hyatts in the world and 20 Hyatts in the making and that by 1974 the Hyatt group will employ over 25,000 people. The Singapore Hyatt will obviously benefit from this world-wide connection. This is also true for other hotels in Singapore which are part of well-known international chains.

I am very pleased, indeed, to have been invited to declare open the Singapore Hyatt Hotel. Whilst my colleague, the Foreign Minister, Mr. S. Rajaratnam, claims to be a professional hotel-opener in having opened so many recently, I am today, though a new comer to this field, opening the biggest hotel so far with 900 rooms and this is good going for a first-timer.

Moreover, the General Manager of the Singapore Hyatt, Mr. Jim Hall, is a good hotelier and salesman! I could not say no to him with his genial charm and persuasive powers. His obvious humility and smiling personality hide his genuine strength in knowing what he wants and getting it. I do not know whether this

is true of every member of the establishment and is readily available across the counter nor do I want to sell the Singapore Hyatt as such. But the point I wish to make is that service and for that matter always with a smile are what any hotel first must provide. The creature comforts as the facilities are sometimes referred to are an important consideration but they follow and not precede and by no means replace friendly service. This at least has been my expectation of hotels in my travel and believe me when I say that some of my best introductions to a new country and good friends that I make thereby are found in the staff of the hotels. And being polite and courteous as a daily discipline and routine reflex on the part of those working in a hotel can bring them enormous satisfaction in seeing the happy clients who become good and lasting friends as opposed to irate or frustrated individuals.

When I received the invitation to open this Hotel today I was pleasantly surprised to find a green passport with it, which you have all also got. This is more than a clever move; it shows human understanding and creative innovation, features which the hotel and tourist industries in any part of the world need all the time. All of us like our passports to be multi-purpose and this one is valid for a year. Let us hope that it simply means that all of us can come here within the next year for any number of occasions for dining and diving on the house at the Singapore Hyatt!

Again on a more serious note, much has been said recently and publicly of the apparent excess capacity in tourist hotels in Singapore and the problems faced by the financiers and managements. However, these are big and necessarily long-term investments and are a prerequisite before we can work for and expect more tourists

and better patronage and profit. They must precede and not follow the expansion of tourism in any country, as has been the experience of others. They are now facts of which we can be pleased and proud about, because we have some of the best hotels in the world and can provide the visitor with the modern comforts and varied and exotic experiences that they seek. However, it is at this time that we should work harder and more together rather than separately in trying to build up a better understanding of Singapore and its attractions overseas and in getting more people to look to Singapore for an interesting and enjoyable holiday overseas. We have the product but it must be sold hard and well in situations which are very competitive, since more and more countries are possibly for the same tourist dollar. In the long-term, it will appear much better for the hotels to work together as far as possible where their collective interests are concerned and this includes overseas promotion and trying to get their hotels and Singapore as venues for conventions, now that we have the facilities.

We now have 154 hotels of various descriptions in existence in Singapore but that only 11 of these, including this Hotel, have 200 rooms or more. The average occupancy level, according to the Tourist Promotion Board statistics, is still quite high, being around 70% and this is natural in view of the greater availability of hotel accommodation. The point I wish to make is this. Competition between hotels is keen and will always be keen. What we do not wish to see is competition in the form of a price war. At present, good services are being provided. Some hotels provide newspapers to guests everyday. They shine your shoes. And there are many extra services. They don't have to do these, but the services are provided to attract more guests. Once you have price-cutting, these extra services would be the first to go. Once

you go down the slippery path of lowering the quality of services provided, then the whole industry will suffer. However, a general and concerted effort to reduce tariffs is a good thing.

Through the Tourist Promotion Board, the Government has made and will continue to make special efforts to get more tourists into Singapore. The Hotel Industry, however, must work together in even closer co-operation and be creative enough to make its sales promotion campaign fully effective. If there is to be any competition between hotels, it should be a healthy form of competition to provide better services and facilities.

Lastly, the international reputation we have gained as a very hard-working but at the same time warm and friendly people must be further enhanced by conscious effort to be cordial, polite and helpful to our visitors from abroad. As you are aware, our Prime Minister has himself urged our people to be polite and friendly all the time to our visitors and I think the message has been taken generally in that more and more of our friends from overseas are having better thoughts and words of and for the people of Singapore. We must sustain and improve on this spirit of hospitality and cordiality towards our visitors.

Now it is my great pleasure in declaring the Singapore Hyatt Hotel open.

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