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SPEECH BY THE ACTING PRESIDENT, DR. YEOH GHIM SENG,  
AT THE CEREMONY MARKING THE LANDING SITE OF SIR  
STAMFORD RAFFLES ON 3RD FEBRUARY, 1972 AT 6.00 P.M.

Minister for Finance, Chairman, Tourist Promotion Board, Ladies and  
Gentlemen,

I am glad to have been invited to officiate at this evening's  
ceremony which gives official recognition to the landing site of the  
founder of Singapore.

When Sir Stamford Raffles first set foot on the banks of the  
Singapore Rivor on that historic day of January 1819, he found a swampy  
fishing village with less than a hundred small houses and huts at the  
mouth of the river. There was only one large house belonging to the  
Tomonggong. According to historical record, Raffles arranged for the  
Tomonggong and his followers to move to Telok Blangah at the cost of  
5,000 Spanish dollars and directed that the vacated land be reserved for  
government purposes.

Singapore has come a long way since then. The high-rise flats  
and offices, the luxurious hotels, the industrial complexes, the large  
ocean liners anchored in the harbour and the steady hum of traffic are  
manifestations of a thriving city and seaport. The success of Singapore  
is due in no small measure to the foresight of Raffles in recognising  
the strategic position of Singapore which had changed its destiny from  
that of an obscure fishing village to a great centre of commerce and the  
nerve centre of Asia. In giving due recognition to Raffles we must not  
forget the ondeavours and dedication of the early immigrants who were  
the true pioneers and to whom Singaporeans owe so much. The greatest  
tribute we can pay them is by continuing to strive for the progress and  
happiness of Singapore. However, in our efforts to create a better  
future for our people and to improve their living conditions, and in the  
interest of progress in general, it is sometimes necessary to sacrifice  
parts of our heritage such as historic sites and buildings. This is the  
conflict nation builders have to face. In our eagerness to build a new  
and progressive Singapore let us not forget our past. We owe it to  
our future generations to preserve something from the old and more rugged  
days. Tourists are generally attracted by the old, the exotic, and the  
unusual. A city with only high-rise buildings will not interest tourists.

To those coming from large cities, this city will merely be a duplication of what they have already seen in their own countries. On the other hand, tourist guides will certainly have more to say about historic sites and buildings which, besides being unique, are subjects of fascinating commentaries and anecdotes.

Whilst it is true that our historic sites, monuments and buildings are not as famous and awe-inspiring as those in countries with longer histories, it is not true to say that we have nothing to interest the tourist in the way of historic sites and buildings. The diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the people of Singapore are reflected in the diversity of its buildings and architecture which are in essence the expressions of the hopes and aspirations of each immigrant race. Not many countries can boast of such diversity in architecture within such a small land area. It is not uncommon to find a typical Chinese or Hindu-styled building rubbing shoulders with a modern concrete and glass skyscraper. This diversity which Singaporeans take for granted is of extreme interest to the tourist.

We have to strike a happy medium whereby we can progress unhampered and at the same time preserve something of our past to which we can look back with pride. I am happy to say that the government has not overlooked this point. The Preservation of Monuments Bill was passed in November 1970 by which a Board was established whose primary responsibility was to preserve for the benefit of the nation, monuments of historic, traditional, archaeological, architectural or artistic interest. It is in the hands of this Board that we entrust the responsibility of preserving old Singapore.

Now it gives me great pleasure to unveil the plaque in recognition of the landing site of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, founder of modern Singapore.

DATED: FEBRUARY 3, 1972.

TIME ISSUED: 1630 HOURS

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