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Singapore Government

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**SPEECH BY MR GOH CHOK TONG, FIRST DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF PASSENGER
SERVICE OF THE SIXTH SECTION OF THE MRT SYSTEM AT TANAH
MERAH STATION ON SATURDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 1989 AT 9.45 AM**

Two years ago, we opened the first MRT line from Toa Payoh to Orchard. Today I have the pleasure of opening what is by far the longest stretch of the MRT system, from Marina Bay to Tanah Merah. This stretch covers a distance of 15 kilometres, serves four GRCs and five single constituencies with a population of about half a million Singaporeans.

I am sure this opening is welcomed by all Singaporeans, not just residents in the eastern sector of Singapore. Singaporeans now have at their disposal 35 MRT stations covering a total distance of 53 kilometres.

The MRT is no longer the latest craze of Singaporeans. Gone is the novelty of travelling to work by train. It is now very much a part of the lives of those who use it everyday, for work, business, recreation or to visit friends and relatives. I do not expect today's opening to grab the same headlines as those of two years ago. Then the sense of excitement was palpable. You could feel it in the air and see it in people's faces. The newspapers captured it with headlines such as these:

"Hottest show in town" (Sunday Times, 8 Nov 87).

"History was made - all aboard for the subway age"
(Sunday Times, 8 Nov 87).

"First-day excitement - 3-hour vigil just to be
first on board" (Sunday Times, 8 Nov 87).

"Moving towards a new era" (Berita Minggu, 3 Nov 87).

"Stepping into the Age of the MRT" (Lianhe Zaobao, 8 Nov 87).

Has the MRT met the expectations of the passengers? I believe it has. MRT monitors feedback from passengers. These feedback confirms what we had expected - that passengers are impressed with the reliability, speed and comfort of travelling by MRT, besides the architectural designs of the stations. They appreciate travelling in air-conditioned comfort, arriving fresh for work or dates with their friends, unlike bus trips.

Recently, a most distinguished group took a ride on our MRT. These were some of the Commonwealth Heads of Government. Mr Fock Siew Wah accompanied them. I was told that they were most impressed by the overall system. They used such adjectives to describe it - "fast, comfortable, smooth, clean, efficient".

Perhaps it is not surprising that our MRT system should receive such high marks from passengers and visitors. It is after all new, incorporating the latest technology. Will the same positive comments be made, say 10 or 20 years from now? This will be the real test of our ability. To build is difficult, but to keep up high standards indefinitely is even more of a challenge.

We will be able to do so if we take this year's Productivity Campaign theme to heart. This year's theme is "Customer Satisfaction". If we insist on selling a high standard of service, not just operating trains, and seek to maximise our passengers' satisfaction, not just transporting them from point to point, we can do so. In fact, SMRT is taking another step to increase 'customer satisfaction'.

Today, the MRT and the bus system operate as separate service. For the convenience of passengers, they will be integrated soon. I am told SMRT and the bus operators have made progress in developing a common ticketing system. They expect to put some of the equipment onto buses for pilot trials some time in February next year. I understand the system will permit cashless payment for the purchase of the common ticket. This will be similar to the MRT stored value ticket. If feasible, it will mean greater convenience for passengers who can buy a common ticket for travel on MRT and buses and pay for it through NETS or GIRO. Then passengers do not have to carry cash for travel by bus and MRT. It will be one step closer to a cashless society.

Work on the remaining sections of the MRT system goes on smoothly. The extension to Pasir Ris will come soon after today's celebrations - on 16 December, just in time for Christmas. With this extension, we can all look forward to going to the seaside resort there in a breeze.

The success of the MRT is the result of dedicated teamwork. It is a fine example of what we can achieve as a community. On behalf of the Government and the commuting public, I thank all those who made the MRT function so successfully, in particular, the 3,000 employees of MRT and SMRT - the drivers, front line staff like station assistants, maintenance crew, schedulers, planners, engineers, surveyors, construction workers, and the management team.

On this note, may I wish you all many pleasant trips on the MRT.

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