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SPEECH BY DR RICHARD HU, MINISTER FOR FINANCE AND
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AT THE LAUNCH OF THE PUBLICATIONS
ON PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ON WEDNESDAY, 11 AUG 93,
AT 9.00AM AT THE MND AUDITORIUM

Mr Lim Kee Ming, Chairman,
Preservation of Monuments Board

Prof Khoo Cheng Lim, Chairman, URA,
Ladies and Gentlemen

The Government appointed the Urban Redevelopment Authority as Singapore's conservation authority in 1989. At the same time, it entrusted URA with the task of drawing up a Conservation Master Plan. This Master Plan has been completed and 5,200 buildings gazetted for conservation. Thirty-two other buildings have been gazetted as national monuments.

2 I understand that the private owners of about 2,000 or 40 per cent of these gazetted buildings have either begun restoration work or submitted restoration plans for URA's approval. Restoration works on 700 of these buildings are almost complete. Another 700 buildings are in various stages of restoration.

3 In fact, in the last four years, the number of applications for approval of restoration plans has tripled, from about 1,330 applications in 1989 to over 4,300 in 1992. Singaporeans' keen interest in conservation is also seen in the strong demand for restored buildings. So far, URA has sold 337 restored shophouses.

4 I am encouraged by the private sector's active participation in our conservation efforts. This augurs well for our conservation programme because, ultimately, the private sector must take the lead in the conservation programme.

5 We have preserved several outstanding architectural and historical landmarks under the initial phase of the conservation programme. Modern skyscrapers notwithstanding, these conservation buildings in our city retain their distinctive charm, reflecting our multi-cultural heritage and history. The conservation programme has also injected new life and character to places like Boat Quay, Emerald Hill, Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam.

6 Restoring old buildings is a delicate task. It calls for new skills and techniques, from both the professionals and contractors. These skills can be effectively translated only if there are well defined conservation standards. URA has therefore, decided to focus on promoting good conservation practices, as part of the next phase of the conservation programme.

7 URA is well placed to define and promote these standards. It has taken advantage of the valuable experience it gained in restoring old shophouses such as those in Tanjong Pagar, and other buildings, such as the Raffles Hotel and the CHIJ Chapel, and drawn up certain tested conservation standards.

8 The government's conservation efforts will succeed only through the continued partnership between the public and private sector. Together, we can recapture and restore the charm of Singapore's heritage and bring life and activity back to our historic districts. In the process we will be creating new business opportunities for our people.

9 URA has meanwhile embarked on several projects to show that conservation need not necessarily be more expensive or slower than rebuilding. These include an exhibition and seminar on conservation, scheduled for early 1994, and several publications on conservation.

10 One of these publications is the book "Objectives, Principles and Standards for Preservation and Conservation". A joint effort between the URA and the Preservation of Monuments Board. It details the concept and philosophy of conservation and preservation in Singapore. It is intended to become Singapore's conservation charter. I am sure that it will inspire and guide many more engineers and architects, as well as owners of buildings earmarked for conservation, in their restoration work.

11 It now gives me great pleasure to launch the book,
"Objectives, Principles and Standards for Preservation and
Conservation" and the first series of technical brochures on
Conservation, "Our Heritage is in Our Hands".

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