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**SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER MR LEE KUAN YEW AT THE DINNER IN HONOUR OF MR N I RYZHKOV, CHAIRMAN, COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, OF THE UNION OF THE SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS, ON 16 FEBRUARY 1990 AT ISTANA**

It gives me great pleasure to extend a warm welcome to you, Mr Chairman, your wife and members of your delegation. The Government and people of Singapore are honoured by your visit, the first by a chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics.

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We are two very different countries. Your population is more than a hundred times that of Singapore. The Soviet Union spans eleven time zones. We have different economic, social and political systems. Nevertheless, we share the same aspirations: peace and a good life for our people on this increasingly fragile planet.

I am happy that our bilateral relations have taken a step forward with your visit. Today we have signed an agreement for a Joint Economic Commission. We are also ready to consider Investment Guarantee and Double Taxation arrangements with the Soviet Union. We are ready to make a serious commitment both to improve our economic cooperation and to support perestroika.

Distant as we are from Moscow, we too wish perestroika success. We have watched with awe and amazement how the new political thinking has brought down barriers in Europe, barriers which seemed destined to last forever. Even in November last year, I would not have believed that the Berlin Wall would come down in December. But it did. The political map of Europe has changed. And more changes are on the way. We hope that this new era will mean a better life in the "Common European Home" you are now trying to build.

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The problems of perestroika and glasnost appear formidable. However, the history of the Soviet people and their society is one of great resilience. Time and again in history, during the time of troubles in the 17th Century, during Napoleon's invasion of Russia in the 19th Century, and during the Great Patriotic War in the 20th Century, when Hitler betrayed his ignorance of the Soviet Union's tenacious and resilient character, the Soviet people have shown that they

may be slow to change but once embarked upon change, they should not be underrated.

The tensions of the Cold War were felt most acutely in Europe. But since World War II the flames of war did not erupt there. Since then, more lives were lost in Southeast Asia, than in Europe. Even today, the flames of war have not been totally snuffed out in this region. Cambodia remains a victim. We sincerely hope that the Soviet Union will help to snuff out these last embers by helping to persuade Vietnam that a new era has begun in the world. Vietnam should wind up its unfortunate involvement in Cambodia which has been since December 1978, and should instead work with ASEAN to build a better life for its people. Singapore is ready to play its part in Indochina once the Cambodian conflict is resolved by an agreement on a UN interim Administration followed by a UN supervised free and fair election.

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The Asia-Pacific Basin is ready for take off. Inspired by the brilliant success of Japan, the countries of the East and Southeast Asia are confident that they can march into the 21st century at high rates of growth. There is a mood of determination and confidence to achieve rapid economic transformation. As Moscow translates her "New Political Thinking" into new and different policies

for the Asia Pacific region, we look forward to the Soviet Union participating in the rapid growth of this region.

However, these developments presuppose that there are no sudden political and military disruptions. Historically, the United States has been a stabilising factor in the Pacific Basin. The United States is a Pacific power whose continued presence will reinforce the stability upon which the Pacific economies will grow. Despite the Atlantic Ocean that separates the European and North Americans continents, the Soviet Union has stressed the need for the United States and Canada to be part of the "Common European Home". For the same reason, the continued presence of the United States is essential for peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

Finally, Mr Chairman, upon your return to Moscow, will you bring back the message that all of us in Singapore wish you well. A new era has been opened in world history with the advent of perestroika. Please convey to President Gorbachev that we are deeply impressed with the courageous and revolutionary changes he has already brought about and wish him further successes.

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Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman, may I now invite you to rise and join me in a toast to President Gorbahev, to our honourable guests, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Mr Ryzhkov and Mrs Ryzhkova and to the Government and peoples of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics.

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