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ADDRESS BY SENIOR MINISTER, MR LEE KUAN YEW, AT THE GROUND-BREAKING CEREMONY FOR THE MERLION TOWER, SENTOSA ON SATURDAY, 4 SEPTEMBER 1993 AT 8.30 PM

One night, twenty-one years ago, I inaugurated the Merlion at the mouth of the Singapore River by lighting up and getting it to spout out a stream of water. It was our first tourist logo.

Singapore was then just picking up as a tourist destination. Total visitors to Singapore was just over 800,000. There were few attractions to tempt international travellers to Southeast Asia.

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At that time, this island was known as Pulau Blakang Mati or "island behind death". It has just been handed back to the government after the British Military Forces decided to leave. Few people visited the island which had barracks for the Gurkhas. The name did not sound appropriate for a tourist spot. It was not catchy. So I proposed that we rename it Sentosa, Malay for peace and tranquility.

Today, six million visitors a year from all over the world visit Singapore. This number has been increasing at 8.6 per cent over the last 10 years and will probably increase to 4.5 per cent in the next ten. About 70 per cent of them have come to sightsee. Last year, Sentosa attracted 3.6 million visitors, both local and foreign visitors.

We are increasing night time attractions in Sentosa. The musical fountain, started in 1982, is attracting night crowds. It received about one million people each year. We have two hotels on the island. Soon we will have the $11 million National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) Sentosa Beach Resort, Singapore's first five-star campsite. Here, campers can rough it out by sleeping outdoors under the stars and yet have at hand modern amenities such as a cafeteria, games room and a swimming pool.

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Today, I break the ground for a major investment - the Merlion Tower 37 metres high to be completed in April 1995.

It will become the focal point of the north-south axis of Sentosa. It will lead visitors from the ferry terminal in the north, to the beaches in the south, and there will be many attractions along the way.

To all involved in this project, I offer my best wishes. I hope the Merlion Tower will be a brighter logo drawing more generations of holiday-makers to Sentosa.

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