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PRESS RELEASE

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**ADDRESS BY MR LEE YOCK SUAN,
MINISTER FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY AND
SECOND MINISTER FOR FINANCE,
AT THE INAUGURAL SINGAPORE TOURISM CONFERENCE
AT ISLAND BALLROOM, SHANGRI-LA HOTEL
ON WEDNESDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 1997 AT 9.30 AM**

Since the launch of the Tourism 21 master-plan in July last year, the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB) has been working on various projects to translate the plan into reality. The STPB has initiated a process of rejuvenation and enhancement to capitalise on our strong points as a tourist destination. As competition becomes more intense, we need to position ourselves better to compete successfully for the tourist dollar. We also need a good understanding of why tourists from different sources choose to visit Singapore.

Singapore is poised to become the first developed country in the tropics. Visitors are impressed with our clean and green environment, our orderliness, our efficiency and our thriving economy. Singapore is cosmopolitan and Asian, with an interesting mix of three main ethnic groups. Our city is well planned and attractive. At night the soft lighting enhances the charm and beauty of the city. Our traffic flows smoothly and we have the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT). As Singaporeans it is wonderful to be home especially after a visit to some cities where planners seem to have given up.

The success story of Singapore is well known. Singapore has the

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of a vibrant cosmopolitan city in a rapidly developing New Asia, a region with mystical cultures, throbbing with life and bursting with opportunities. It is an image which we should build upon to draw in more well-heeled tourists from around the globe.

This aim to expand and upgrade our tourism industry is the main target of our Tourism 21 Plan, which seeks to build on Singapore as a tourist destination, a tourism business centre and a tourism hub.

Several aspects of the Tourism 21 Plan are being implemented. We are building near the Changi Airport a large exhibition centre known as Singapore Expo' which will be ready in early 1999. It will have a total of 60,000 sq m of column-free exhibition space, with potential to increase to 100,000 sq m eventually. As some of the exhibition halls at the World Trade Centre gradually make way for redevelopment, Singapore Expo and Suntec City will enable us to maintain our position as the premier exhibition centre of the region.

Another recommendation of the Tourism 21 Plan is the development of thematic zones. The STPB will identify historically and culturally significant areas of Singapore, and guide their development into thematic zones, each with its own distinct character and story. This "personality" of the area will be conveyed to visitors via the interweaving of architecture, streetscaping, ambience as well as those vital human elements that give character to a place.

The STPB has established a Strategic Business Unit on Thematic Development to drive all such activities. Chinatown has been identified as the prototype thematic zone. Working closely with consultants and other

government agencies, including the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), the STPB is looking into ways in which this ethnic district can contribute further to the overall tourism experience. The Chinatown Retailers Pro-Tem Committee and the Kreta Ayer Citizens' Consultative Committee have provided the STPB with invaluable feedback and suggestions on possible improvements to the area.

The re-introduction of a residential population will help inject life back into the area and make it a bustling hive of activity, especially in the evenings. URA has zoned several vacant plots of land for high-density mixed development.

There is also a proposal to recreate Chinatown's identity by associating different pockets of Chinatown with themes based on common activities found within that area. For example, Pagoda Street has the potential for a bazaar theme. Smith Street, with its high concentration of food and beverage outlets, could be developed as a "food street". Temple Street would retain its traditional character, while Trengganu Street, one of the most traversed streets in Chinatown, could be positioned as a "festive street".

The story of this culturally and historically rich ethnic district will be effectively communicated through an Interpretative Centre. The STPB and its partners are exploring various means of expression to see how the Chinatown story can best be told. At the same time, "story maps" have already been produced by the STPB to help guide visitors along the intriguing walking trails of Chinatown.

While Chinatown is the pilot project for thematic development, the STPB is also involved in other thematic projects. The Singapore River for

example, is being given a new lease of life as it is developed into a quality lifestyle and leisure venue, with high-end accommodation, water-front restaurants, shops and other leisure facilities.

The URA has launched the Entertainment Zone in June. This project will imbue that part of our city with even more vibrance and excitement. It will be characterised by bright lights, street fare and hopefully world-class entertainment.

Planning work has also begun on the Mall of Singapore, which stretches from Orchard Road to Marina Square, with extensions to the ethnic districts. There is much potential to turn this area into an even more exciting multi-faceted destination made up of integrated shopping, dining and entertainment clusters offering variety, quality and memorable experiences.

Significant progress has also been made in pursuit of Singapore's vision to become a global city for the arts. The city has played host to a rich variety of both visual and performing arts events. Some highlights include the Phantom of the Opera, the world premiere of the mega-opera AIDA, the Festival of Asian Performing Arts, Tresors International Fine Arts and Antiques Fair and Masterpieces from the Guggenheim Museum at the Singapore Art Museum. Continuing in this series, the Singapore Art Museum will exhibit the works of Leonardo da Vinci early next month. This and other key events of Celebration Singapore this year are examples of our efforts to make Singapore a more enjoyable place to live in and to visit.

Such projects capitalise on what is already in Singapore. The Government and the private sector have invested heavily to build a beautiful city and to improve our quality of life. Our conservation efforts and cultural

diversity have combined with our international links, western outlook and modern facilities to produce a unique blend of the east and the west, the old and the new. Projects such as Boat Quay have been extremely successful in attracting both locals and foreigners to savour a more varied night life. We should continue to identify and develop such projects which are unique to Singapore, which provide more leisure outlets for Singaporeans and which will also attract more tourists here.

Quality shopping and good food continue to feature among Singapore's main attractions to tourists, in spite of increasing competition from our neighbours. Singaporeans have strong purchasing power and increasingly sophisticated taste for international cuisine, music and the arts, and other finer things in life. Such pursuits do not come cheap. However cost is not necessarily a barrier to tourists who can afford, or who save up, to visit such places as London, Paris and New York.

There will continue to be a place for man-made attractions in Singapore such as 'Night Safari' and 'Underwater World'. However such winners are hard to come by and often difficult to sustain. We need to understand what appeals to different sections of our population and our visitors. For example, computer-based entertainment centres are very popular with the young. Our investors have to continue to innovate, upgrade and seek out new market niches.

Where we are lacking in terms of natural endowments we should co-operate with our neighbours to enhance the complementary tourism attractions of the region. A good example is the Bintan Resort which is a short ferry ride from Singapore. There is scope for more golfing, cruising or resort holidays based on Singapore as the staging point and tourism hub.

In line with this concept Singaporeans have invested heavily in tourist facilities in the region. As at December 1996, the top 15 Singapore hotel companies own more than 170 hotels with over 43,000 rooms overseas. Singapore companies are also actively involved in the development of new lifestyle and leisure products in the region, ranging from themed dining outlets such as Hard Rock Café and Planet Hollywood, to marine aquariums, entertainment complexes and culture theme parks in countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam and China. These developments have made positive contributions to the development of the region's tourism industry, and have enhanced visitors' travel experiences.

In keeping with the new marketing concept of New Asia-Singapore, our tour operators should consider how they can re-package their tours to showcase the different aspects of Singapore and provide the tourists with an experience which is uniquely Singaporean. We have much to show and tell which may be of interest to tourists.

All of us who are involved in the tourism sector should work together to bring our tourism industry to a higher plane. Tourism is one of the world's largest industries responsible for 11 per cent of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1996. The futurist John Naisbitt views travel and tourism as one of the three industries of the 21st century together with telecommunications and information technology. The STPB and other relevant agencies are happy to co-operate with and support the private sector in this challenging task of upgrading our tourism industry.

In closing, may I wish all of you an enlightening and fruitful conference. Please do provide your ideas and suggestions to guide the STPB and my Ministry in our work.