

# Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY MR TEH CHEANG WAN, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE SYMPOSIUM ON "UNDERGROUND WORKS AND SPECIAL FOUNDATIONS" AT THE SHANGRI-LA HOTEL ON MONDAY, 8 MARCH 1982 AT 11 AM

I am delighted to be invited here this morning to declare open the Symposium on "Underground Works and Special Foundations" organised by the French Ministry of Environment and the French Board of International Cooperation.

Political stability in Singapore and the Asean region has generated rapid economic progress during the last few years. The pace of economic development in the region is expected to be sustained at a high level in the foreseeable future. With economic progress, there has been, and will continue to be, extensive construction activity in Asean countries. In Singapore and other big Asean cities, intensive and highrise construction will lead to increasing utilisation of undersurface areas and wider application of undersurface engineering techniques. For large building projects, underground basement floors are very important areas for office, shopping and parking uses. The subsurface areas will increasingly be used for the laying of essential services, such as power transmission and telecommunications lines, water supplies, sewers and other infrastructure. As urban traffic becomes more congested, Asean cities will have to consider the development of efficient mass transport systems. Some of them will choose to build underground rapid rail systems linked by underground stations. In land scarce Singapore, another important application of undersurface engineering is stabilization of reclaimed lands.

The organisation of this Symposium is thus extremely appropriate and particularly timely for Singapore in view of our interest in the provision of an MRT. The Symposium will provide a forum for the exchange of ideas among speakers and participants and give those involved in underground engineering an opportunity to learn about recent European advances in this field.

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Because of our historical links with Britain and the English language, Singaporean students going for studies overseas generally attend British, Australian, American and other English-speaking universities. As a result, there has been lesser contact with the French, although France is one of the acknowledged leaders in engineering technology. I for one have tried hard to tap French technology. However, my first attempt in the early 1960s, when I was with the Housing and Development Board, proved to be unsuccessful. A local HDB contractor had sent me a proposal for a public housing project using French techniques of industrialised construction which I readily accepted. Unfortunately, the local contractor chose the wrong partner from France for the project to build 10 blocks of 10-storey flats. After building the first two blocks up to the eighth storey, the French partner abandoned the project, after collecting the licensee fees. The local firm went bankrupt and the HDB had to prepare a design to complete the top two floors by the traditional method of construction. This failure probably set back by many years the use of French building technology in Singapore.

However, the failure of one French firm should not blacken all French companies in general. I am happy to say that the HDB recently awarded a huge prefabrication contract worth \$500 million to a French company, Coignet-GTM, to build 15,000 units of flats. The HDB is confident that this contractor will successfully complete the project. I look forward to seeing more French contractors, consultant firms and companies dealing in tunnelling and other specialised construction plant and equipment participating in the construction industry not only in Singapore, but also in the whole Asean region.

It now gives me great pleasure to declare the Symposium open.

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