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SPEECH BY DR TAY ENG SOON, MINISTER OF STATE FOR EDUCATION,
AT THE 21ST ANNIVERSARY DINNER OF THE FINANCE HOUSES
ASSOCIATION OF SINGAPORE AT THE WESTIN STAMFORD
(CANNING ROOM), ON SATURDAY, 23 JULY 1988, AT 8.00 PM

I am very pleased to be present at your Association's 21st Anniversary Dinner. Normally, for an individual, the 21st birthday has a special significance. He comes of age at 21. He can vote, take out bank loans and get married without his parents' permission! These do not obviously apply to members of your Association which are all mature members. Nevertheless, it is worth reflecting on 21 years of achievement on an occasion such as this.

Singapore became independent in 1965, 23 years ago. So your history coincides with the history of Singapore since Independence. Every visitor to Singapore, without exception, has noticed our development. They always remark about the highly visible changes in our landscape - splendid new housing estates, tree-lined roads, the completely new skyline of our city and central business district. The more observant notice the Singaporeans on Orchard Rd, their self-confidence, the way they dress. There are indeed innumerable signs of progress and well-being among our citizens. Perhaps foreign visitors can at best gain a superficial view of changes in Singapore. The account is more telling when it is given by Singaporeans who have travelled abroad. They can compare what has become norm in Singapore with developments that they see elsewhere. In every case, their overseas travels enhance their appreciation of what has been achieved here.

In a few weeks' time, we will be celebrating National Day. With all the economic indicators showing a positive trend, we will indeed have much to celebrate about this year. The property market, after being stagnant for the past few years, is beginning to pick up again. Investments this year is likely to exceed last year's level. The Oct 19 stock market crash last year seems also to be a thing of the past judging by the Straits Times index which has climbed beyond the 1000 mark. Confidence has returned testifying to the fact that the basics in Singapore are sound. Even the several political rumblings that we have had, e.g. the re-arrest of the Marxist group and the Hendrickson affair, have not affected confidence, contrary to what some pundits fear.

The soundness which we enjoy is something which has been built up over the years. What does it consist of? It consists, most of all, in the confidence which exists between our people and their government. This includes the belief that the government is rational, predictable, fair though firm and dependable. It is the same expectation that a businessman would have of a good partner or a colleague. This trust is, of course, invested and manifested in the leaders who are elected into Parliament and the Government. The quality of this leadership cannot be better than the people elected into Parliament from which the Government is formed. This is why the renewal of our Parliament every four or five years by the process of the general elections is a crucial exercise. Out of the presence of a good government and the trust that develops between it and the people will flow the confidence, the progress and the development that we have witnessed in Singapore up to now.

Let me now turn to your sector, the financial sector. In finding out more about the financial sector, I am particularly impressed by one thing, that is the importance that you attach to education and training. This is to be

found particularly in the existence of the Institute of Banking and Finance (IBF), a non-profit, self-financing institute. The IBF has 240 members from the banking and financial community.

The IBF was initiated in 1974 by the MAS and has on its governing council, representatives nominated by the major sections of the membership. Its charter is simply to organise and provide courses needed by its members for their employees. These include fairly long-term diploma courses to shorter adhoc courses. All the courses are conducted on a part-time basis to enable working people to attend. Last year, the IBF ran 127 courses which attracted 7600 participants.

What is attractive and commendable about the IBF courses is that they are all self-financing. The fees charged have to be high enough to pay for specialist lecturers, many of whom are brought in specially from overseas. In certain approved courses, the firms sponsoring the participants are reimbursed by SDF. But for other courses, the sponsors or the participants themselves pay the full cost. Despite that, the courses are in demand. This is the best market test for any product including training courses. The IBF, of course, takes great pains to find out what courses firms want and are responsible for selecting lecturers and certification of the course.

I believe that the work of the IBF has over the years raised the standard and quality of services provided by our financial and banking sector.

We have always felt that industry sectors should play a bigger role in training for their own employees. The IBF model has shown that this is not only viable but also beneficial for the banking and financial sector. The insurance industry has also organised its own system of

training. The tourism industry under the leadership of the STPB is examining the longer term manpower and training needs for the industry. I would recommend that they look at the IBF model to see if it could not be adopted by the tourism and hotel industry.

May I conclude by wishing all of you a prosperous year ahead.

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