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**ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT WEE KIM WEE
AT THE OPENING OF THE THIRD SESSION OF THE SEVENTH PARLIAMENT
ON FRIDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 1991 AT 8.30 PM**

A New World

We are at a turning point in international affairs. A major war is in progress in the Persian Gulf. Its outcome will determine whether there can be a durable peace in the Middle East, and whether the UN and US emerge strengthened from the crisis. Already the decisive response of the multinational forces to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait has established the principle that armed aggression is not an acceptable way to further national ambitions.

Last year, after the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe collapsed, and the Soviet Union committed itself to perestroika and glasnost, prospects for world peace seemed favourable. Major international tensions had been resolved. The superpowers would disarm, and nations would enjoy a peace dividend.

But recent events in the Soviet Union show that the transition from Communism and a command economy to democracy and a free market is difficult and uncertain. The shape of the new landscape is still unclear. While overall the change is undoubtedly for the better, the post Cold War world will have its own dangers and tensions.

The Next Lap

Within our region, prospects are favourable. The tremendous economic growth of East and Southeast Asia is likely to continue. In Singapore, we have started a new chapter in our

young history. Mr Goh Chok Tong took office as Prime Minister in November 1990. A new generation of leaders is in place.

The Independence generation of Singaporeans created the prosperous and secure nation that we know. They started out with precious little, but have handed on to us many valuable assets. The creation of an Elected Presidency to safeguard our accumulated savings and national reserves symbolises this transformation. Today we can plan ahead for the next 25 years, and marshall the resources needed to turn bold ideas into reality.

Over the past year, my Government has been working on long term plans to secure Singapore's future. The main proposals are contained in the book "The Next Lap" which is attached to my Address this evening.

Common Ownership and Collective Responsibility

In the next lap, we must strengthen the sense of common ownership and collective responsibility among Singaporeans. We want to change attitudes and develop civic pride. Every citizen should treat Singapore as he would treat his own home.

Singapore is our home. It belongs to us, all of us. Each one shares in Singapore's security and future. Each has a stake in its wealth and prosperity. We must not only maintain our common home. We must work together to build, expand, and upgrade it.

To achieve this, my Government will widen participation in policy making, invest more in our people, and increase the public and private assets of Singaporeans.

Widening Participation

Every citizen should contribute to make Singapore a better place for all of us. When Singaporeans take an active interest in public affairs, and see their own suggestions making a difference to the community, they will identify more closely

with the success of Singapore. When policies incorporate ideas from many citizens, and take into account their reservations and concerns, the policies will not only be less imperfect, but will also command wider support and acceptance.

For several years, the Government has promoted greater consultation. Feedback Unit forums and Select Committee hearings have become established avenues for collecting views and improving policies. Members of the public participate in many advisory groups rendering advice to government ministries. We will widen the circle of public participation in national issues.

GPCs. Government Parliamentary Committees will play a more prominent role. We will encourage the public to give their views to the GPCs, especially on issues which do not go to Select Committee. The GPCs should not only express these views in Parliament, but also follow them through by proposing amendments to improve legislation.

Service Quality Improvement Unit. Besides discussing policies, many citizens are directly concerned with the quality of service they receive in Government offices - when they pay bills, apply for permits, or write to ministries. The Government will set up a Service Quality Improvement Unit under the Prime Minister's Office, to monitor and improve upon the standard of public administration. All Singaporeans who come into contact with Government departments and statutory boards should suggest ways for these organisations to improve their service. The aim is to maintain the highest possible standards in our public services.

Human Resources

People are our most precious resource. We will devote a larger percentage of our GDP to education. We will build more schools and train more teachers. We will convert all secondary schools to single-session, and later primary schools as well. The ratio of teachers to students will improve.

We will invest in tertiary education. Eventually, 40 per cent of each age group should qualify for university or polytechnic, without compromising academic standards. This year, Nanyang Technological Institute will become a full university, Nanyang Technological University. We have set up a third polytechnic, Temasek Polytechnic. By the turn of the century, we may need a third university and a fourth polytechnic.

The present structure of our education system is sound. But there is room for improvement and fine-tuning. Our aim is to give every child at least 10 years of primary and secondary education. The system should offer children a wider range of educational choices, adapted to their individual aptitudes and needs. It should give more help to weaker pupils, who presently go to the extended and monolingual streams. It should guide such pupils to build on their strengths, especially through technical and vocational education, in order to do better both in school and later on the job market.

We will focus on moral and civic education. The values we share determine how competitive we are economically and how strong we are as one nation. Children should grow up imbued with sound values, aware of Singapore's strengths and vulnerabilities, and conscious of what Singaporeans must do to earn a living for ourselves.

Every Singaporean should be bilingual in his mother tongue and in English, but not all can achieve this with the same ease or competence. While few Malay and Indian children have problems mastering their mother tongues, some Chinese children experience considerable difficulty learning Chinese. We will improve the teaching of Chinese to help pupils achieve a working competence with less stress and effort.

As an investment in the next generation, we are establishing an Edusave Scheme. Every schoolchild from the age of 6 to 16 will have an Edusave account. Each year the accounts will receive some money from an Endowment Fund. Children can use Edusave for part of their school expenses. This will help to

equalize opportunities for every generation, and allow parents to decide how best to use the money to educate their children.

Education is also the key to further Malay progress. My Government supports the efforts of MENDAKI and other community organisations to uplift the Malays. MENDAKI plays a key role, but to succeed many groups must contribute, not MENDAKI alone. Through MENDAKI, the Government will channel assistance to individual community groups whose programmes support the mission and objectives of MENDAKI. The measure of their success is not whether Malays have caught up with other Singaporeans. Rather it is whether the community can achieve successive fixed targets which they set for themselves. In other words, how far the Malays have progressed in absolute terms.

Investing in Infrastructure

My Government will work to increase the assets of Singaporeans. The best way is to generate economic growth and invest in our infrastructure.

We will reclaim more land from the sea. The new land can be used to expand the port and airport, and for industries, housing and recreation.

We will extend the MRT to Woodlands. Work will begin this year, and the extension will be completed in five to seven years. The 16 km line will link the Yishun and Chua Chu Kang stations via Woodlands New Town. It will benefit 130,000 residents in the Northern part of Singapore.

We will make Teleview more widely available, and help families gain access to the system. Eventually, Teleview terminals will be as common and indispensable as telephones are today.

These will be shared assets of Singaporeans.

Increasing Individuals' Assets

We can also give every citizen a more direct sense of ownership, so that he will feel that he in fact owns a part of Singapore. One major asset Singaporeans own is our HDB flats. We are now almost a 100 per cent home-owning society. Over the next two decades, we will modernize the older HDB estates in a multi-billion dollar programme. Many HDB blocks will be refurbished to higher standards. Others will be rebuilt.

Some poorer families living in rental flats still cannot afford to own their own homes, sometimes after working and saving for many years. My Government will introduce new schemes to enable as many of them as possible to own their homes before they are 45 years old.

While incomes of Singaporeans have generally gone up, a few will always need special assistance, either for themselves or for their children. Our philosophy is to provide many helping hands to those in need. The Government will work with charity and community organizations to help them.

The International Position

Our preoccupations must not be only domestic. Most important, we must look outwards to secure our place in the international community. In a shrinking world, to think in terms of Singapore International is a matter of necessity, not choice.

Singapore International Foundation. We will help Singaporeans overseas to organize themselves in clubs and associations, to keep them conscious of their national identity. We will set up a Singapore International Foundation to build an overseas network of friends of Singapore.

Talent. Singapore is what it is today because we have attracted talent from all over the world, especially Asian talent. No city can maintain its excellence by drawing only on indigenous talent. Singaporeans must welcome talent from abroad. Our island and economy are big enough to accommodate all the

talent that we can find.

Nowadays, talent is internationally mobile. Singapore competes against other countries not only to attract foreign talent, but even to retain our own. Whether in terms of infrastructure, housing, or culture, our total environment must compare well with other leading cities in the world.

The Growth Triangle. Singapore is cooperating actively with Indonesia and Malaysia to promote economic development in the Riaus and Johor. All three parties have more to gain by working together as one Growth Triangle, than by competing singly, both against one another and against others. In the last year, this cooperation has made dramatic progress. Joint tourism, industrial, and water projects are taking off in Batam and Bintan. Singapore and Johor are discussing cooperation in manpower training, investment promotion, and development of water resources. The Growth Triangle promises to mark a new and historic phase in our economic and political relationship with Indonesia and Malaysia.

Beyond our immediate neighbours, Singapore will continue to support ASEAN and wider regional groupings like the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, and Malaysia's proposal for an East Asian Economic Grouping (EAEG). We also support a stronger UN, which will be a key institution maintaining international law and order.

National Security

Prospects for continued peace and stability in the region are good. But we should never forget the lessons of Kuwait, and neglect our national security. Singapore took a firm stand against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. We have a vested interest in not condoning a stronger country using force against a weaker one.

We will continue military co-operation with friendly countries, both bilaterally and through the Five-Power Defence

Arrangements. We encourage the US to maintain a military presence in the region for as long as possible. But we cannot depend solely on others for our security. No diplomatic treaties or friendly forces will preserve us, unless Singaporeans are prepared to fight and die to defend Singapore.

National Servicemen and reservists make a vital contribution to our security. We must recognise their contribution, although we can never compensate them fully for their heavy responsibilities. Total Defence and National must remain our way of life.

Conclusion

Before the Gulf crisis, the immediate future appeared full of promise. Now it is more uncertain. The next 25 years will bring many more surprises. We may not be able to control the external environment, but we must respond effectively to changes in it.

While we develop our economy and city, we must also secure our international position. Widening participation in civic life, investing in people and infrastructure, and increasing the assets of Singaporeans will help to strengthen our sense of common ownership and collective responsibility. The basics have not changed: be united and look after one another, work hard and invest, stay vigilant and seize opportunity. These fundamentals will secure our future.

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