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Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY DR YEO NING HONG, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS  
AND INFORMATION AND SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE (POLICY),  
AT THE INAUGURATION OF PUBLIC SERVICE OF  
THE MRT SYSTEM AT THE TOA PAYOH STATION  
ON SATURDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 1987 AT 9.00 AM

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I am happy to be here today to join you in this ceremony to inaugurate the public service of the Mass Rapid Transit system. We are especially happy to have as our special Guest of Honour for this historic occasion, the Second Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Ong Teng Cheong. Mr Ong has been associated with the MRT system right from the very beginning, since the conceptual stages in the 1960's. He was a member of the team of town planners responsible for the masterplan which laid the foundation for modern Singapore and advocated the construction of the MRT system to serve the transportation needs of Singapore. Later as Minister for Communications, Mr Ong was instrumental in getting the Government to commence construction of the system in the early 1980's. We are therefore especially honoured that Mr Ong has kindly consented to inaugurate the first public service of the MRT trains.

This morning, I would like to pay special tribute to all who have helped in the long process of turning what was but a dream into the reality of today, a state-of-the-art MRT system in modern Singapore. Our thanks go:

To the town planners of the 60's; in the darkest days of newly independent Singapore when our nation's very survival was in the balance, these men had the courage to hold forth the vision of a modern city served by a vast network of expressways and a mass rapid transit system;

To those who participated in the many studies and public discussions and debates in the 1970's, exploring the feasibility and viability of an MRT system;

To the members of the Provisional Mass Rapid Transit Authority; their detailed plans made it possible for us to achieve a quick start once the decision to build the MRT was taken in 1982;

To the many professionals and workers, both local and foreign, whose skills and expertise have given us an MRT system we can truly be proud of;

To the MRTC Board Members, led by their outstanding Chairman, Mr Michael Fam, and to the Staff of the MRTC for their close supervision and coordination of the dozens of projects proceeding simultaneously in more than 40 different work-sites;

To all the community leaders who gave us valuable feedback and advice, and helped the MRTC in the difficult and demanding task of explaining to and mediating with residents who were adversely affected by the construction work;

And most important of all, to all Singaporeans; they took the inconvenience and disruption caused by the construction work in their stride; they made the necessary adjustments in their businesses and their lives; they gave us their full cooperation; and they kept complaints down to a minimum and hence enabled work to proceed smoothly with the minimum of wastage of time, energy and resources.

To all these people, I say a big "Thank You". They have given us a good object lesson of how, by working together, we can achieve Excellence for Singapore. When fully operational, the MRT system will be a daily reminder to all Singaporeans of the progress that we are making in achieving our vision to build a City of Excellence. It is rare that

so many people have contributed in such a positive manner to so massive a programme. We are happy, therefore, to be able to express our gratitude in a special way, by starting passenger service of the system some six months ahead of original schedule.

This morning's inauguration ceremony marks the beginning, not the completion of the MRT system. Today only five stations will be open. Greater challenges lie ahead of us, with 37 more stations and some 60 km of tracks at different stages of construction. We look to continued co-operation from the public in all our future efforts. As operator of the system, the SMRT will do its utmost to make our MRT system work as efficiently as possible. For that they need the cooperation of the public too. They want to build on the excellent work done by the MRTTC in its construction stage, and operate the system in a manner that would best serve the public.

The MRT is a totally new transportation system for us in Singapore. It will change our concept of distance, bringing every housing estate in Singapore to just mere minutes away from each other, and from the city centre. It will benefit all Singaporeans, most of all, those who live in housing estates. Most of us may not be familiar with the system. It will take some time for everybody to be familiar with the ticketing machines, the automatic gates, the escalators, and the operation of the trains. So, in the first few weeks teething problems can be expected. I would ask Singaporeans to give SMRT their full cooperation, to take these teething problems in their stride, and to help us make our MRT another major symbol in our progress to becoming a City of Excellence.

Last year we promised to try to have the line to the city centre available for passenger service in time for Christmas. Since the announcement, there had been no inclement weather and no undue delay of any sort to disrupt our progress. So barring unforeseen circumstances, the MRT

trains will extend their run from Toa Payoh to the city centre and on to Outram Park on December 12, 1987. Singaporeans will have a fortnight to do their Christmas and New Year shopping in style, using the MRT of course. I hope this little contribution will make for a merrier Christmas and a happier and more prosperous New Year for all Singaporeans.

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