

PRESS RELEASE

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**SPEECH BY DR YEO NING HONG, MINISTER (COMMUNICATIONS & INFORMATION) AND SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE (POLICY),
AT THE CLOSING CEREMONY TO MARK THE COMPLETION OF
THE MRT PROJECT AND THE OPENING OF BOON LAY STATION
AT THE RAFFLES BALLROOM, WESTIN STAMFORD
ON FRIDAY, 6 JULY 1990 AT 7.00 PM**

Tonight's ceremony to mark the completion of the MRT Project is a happy occasion. This occasion is made all the more auspicious by the presence of our beloved President and Mrs Wee. We thank them for their presence.

Tonight, we celebrate a national achievement. We celebrate the fulfilment of a vision, a vision we aspired to, soon after we became an independent nation. From germination to fruition, the idea of an MRT took 18 years, a time span nearly as long as the period of our independence. Studies on the necessity and feasibility of a mass transit system as one of the various solutions to the transport problem took 8 years. Detailed engineering studies for construction took another three years. All this time, we were uncertain. Could Government afford the cost of construction? Could the public afford the cost of operations? It was only in 1982 that we decided to proceed with the MRT.

Once the decision was taken, construction of the MRT began without delay. All in all it took less than seven years to complete. This is two years ahead of the original schedule. Happily too, the project is also well within budget.

In the Jan 1990 issue of its magazine the "Urban Edge", the World Bank reported its study of 21 cities where MRT systems were either operating, under construction or planning. The study showed that the cost in almost all systems far exceeded the amounts budgetted for. For instance in Miami and Washington, actual cost was 39% and 83% over the forecasted cost respectively. In Manila and Santiago, they were between 60-100%, while in Calcutta and Rio de Janeiro, the overruns were over 500%. On the average, the lines cost between \$100 million and \$300 million for each kilometre. We completed ours at \$70 million per kilometre.

The World Bank study also found that most of these projects took an average of two years longer than expected to complete. Of fifteen cities which were developing or have completed their systems recently, only three cities managed to complete their systems on schedule. Singapore is one of them.

The MRT is the biggest and most complex project we have ever undertaken. Its completion on time and within budget is thus no small achievement.

For this, we have many people to thank. One man deserves special mention. Mr Michael Fam, Chairman of MRTC. He has been at the helm throughout the entire period of construction. His untiring enthusiasm and outstanding leadership has contributed immensely to the project's success. I want to thank the present and former Board Members of the MRTC. Each of them is an outstanding individual in his own field. They brought their dedication, experience and expertise to the task. They gave freely of their time and energy to guide the project in all its many facets - legal, financial, engineering, and manpower, to name a few. I want to thank all who have participated and contributed to the preparation of the project prior to its construction; including Members of the Provisional Mass Rapid Transit Authority and the many study groups. Their thoroughness in addressing all the key issues made it possible for the MRTC to have a quick start. I want to thank Mr Lim Leong Geok, the Executive Director, his project directors, managers, engineers, and all his staff. Leong Geok and his wonderful

teams of men and women worked round the clock, managing and supervising the entire workforce of up to 15,000 people, at the various sites, dealing with all the problems and complications. I want to thank also the contractors, both local and foreign, and their workforce. Many of the foreign contractors and consultants brought the much needed technological expertise which we lacked and helped us build a MRT system according to our specifications such that even their own nationals admire when they visited our MRT. Finally, I want to thank all Singaporeans. They cooperated fully with the MRT. They accepted all the inconvenience without undue complaint. Their whole-hearted support for the project motivated the entire MRT team to focus on the construction, freed them from undue distraction, and inspired them to give of their best. Today we see the end result of the contributions of all these people. To each and everyone of you, I express my deepest appreciation. To each and everyone of you, the nation owes its gratitude.

The MRT with its trains, tunnels, and tracks, is a gift to the nation on its 25th Birthday. I believe this is only the tangible part of the gift. Equally important, if not more so, is the intangible part - the spirit behind the MRT. This spirit embodies: The courage to aspire to a vision of a brighter and better future, even when we were in the dark and difficult days of survival; The strive for excellence, even in an area where we had no experience or expertise at all; And the pursuit of the public good and long-term benefits, even if it involved individual sacrifices, and tolerance of short-term inconvenience. The MRT and the spirit behind it is our gift to ourselves and our children on this our Silver Jubilee of Independence.

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