

**[TO BE EMBARGOED TILL AFTER DELIVERY]
[PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]**

**SPEECH BY DR LEE BOON YANG
MINISTER FOR INFORMATION, COMMUNICATIONS & THE ARTS
AT THE LAUNCH OF THE SINGAPORE HERITAGEFEST 2007
AT SUNTEC CITY'S TROPICS ATRIUM ON
WEDNESDAY, 18 JULY 2007 AT 11.00AM**

Mr Michael Koh, Chief Executive Officer, National Heritage Board

My Parliamentary colleagues

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

Good morning.

**INTERPRETING SINGAPORE HERITAGEFEST 2007
- "WHAT'S YOUR STORY?"**

The Singapore HeritageFest this year is focused on "What's Your Story". We are inviting fellow Singaporeans to share their personal stories and through such stories, to strengthen our bonds and understand each other better.

2 As a young nation, we need to make a greater effort to better appreciate our cultures, heritage and national history to give us a sense of purpose and belonging.

3 Our parents and grandparents may have not been as well educated as the younger Singaporeans. But their awareness of history and heritage may well be as strong if not stronger than Singaporeans today. One reason could be the story-telling tradition that was once a way of life. Today, this tradition seemed to be in decline with the advent of new technology such as television, cinema and the internet.

The Importance of a Story-telling tradition

4 Story-telling is a very ancient oral tradition that has its place in all cultures and civilisations. Through oral traditions, societies everywhere were able to pass down value systems, cultures, customs and folklores which encapsulated key moral values and aspirations.

5 We also had our story-tellers in the past. Many of our immigrant forefathers' favourite pastime was listening to story-tellers who congregated at Read Bridge every night to read stories to the lonely coolies, leaving them with a cliff hanger to be continued the following night. This was more than just relaxation for the hardworking migrant labourers who were mostly uneducated and illiterate. The story-tellers kept the culture, myths and legends alive for migrants who were thousands of miles away from home.

6 In the 1960s and 1970s, Lee Tai Sor and Ng Chia Keng were popular story-tellers in Cantonese and Teochew over Rediffusion. They were able to keep listeners glued to their seats with stories of swashbuckling sword fighters, brave deeds, love, death and tears. I was one of those kids who grew up listening to Ng Chia Keng on Rediffusion. We would cluster around the small brown box after dinner to listen to the day's episode of adventure and heroism. It gave us great satisfaction and got us addicted! We could not wait for the next evening to catch the story as it unfolded. Story-telling was indeed an art and a powerful tool to communicate values, culture and tradition in an engaging way.

7 I am happy to see that story-telling is being reinvented today. The National Heritage Board has systematically collected oral history and has used this primary resource to publish books for children and adults. For example, a children's book on Singapore's Myths and Legends was published two years ago.

8 The National Archives of Singapore has also recently published a guide to help Singaporeans conduct oral history interviews and collect stories from their family and friends. We are training students and teachers in the oral history methodology so that they too can start documenting the history of their schools, parents and grandparents. In

2005, we launched the Singapore Family Tree, an online portal where people can create their family trees, post photographs and other memorabilia. As part of this year's Singapore HeritageFest, the NHB has also introduced a new portal "MyStory". We hope that these efforts will spark a renewed interest in story-telling and sharing.

9 We are also engaging, educating and raising the awareness of our heritage amongst Singaporeans. To assess how successful we have been thus far, the NHB did its first benchmark survey in 2002 to ascertain the heritage awareness of Singaporeans. A follow-up survey was conducted in the first quarter of 2007.

The Heritage Awareness Survey Findings

10 This latest nation-wide survey yielded some interesting findings on what we have been doing so far. I would now like to share with you some of the key findings from this survey. More details will be released by the National Heritage Board.

Heritage Awareness Index

11 Overall, there has been a significant 20% rise in the Heritage Awareness Index. The positive movement of the HAI from 5.24 in 2002 to 6.25 in 2006 is a general reflection of the higher level of heritage awareness among Singaporeans. This also corresponds with the

general improvement in the levels of heritage appreciation, knowledge and action through involvement.

12 Survey respondents supported the Government's efforts in heritage preservation, with an overwhelming majority (92.2%) endorsing the efforts.

13 The survey also showed that there continues to be strong support of 94.6% for heritage preservation as vital to current and future generations of Singaporeans. 82.8% are also in favour of the Government's continued investment of public funds to preserve heritage for current and future generations.

Heritage as a Rooting Factor

14 A vast majority of Singaporeans, in the survey, also strongly affirmed heritage as a "rooting" factor. 87%, up from 82%, agreed that a better understanding of Singapore's history and heritage will increase their own sense of belonging to Singapore. 72%, up from 62.7%, indicated that active participation in heritage activities will also increase their own sense of belonging to Singapore. 90.4% of the respondents, up from 82.3% in 2002, agreed that preserving our local heritage would become more important in this climate of globalisation and as Singapore evolves into a global city.

Increasing awareness of heritage among Singaporeans

15 The survey showed that Singaporeans had an increasing awareness of heritage and there is growing participation in traditional arts and cultural performances, school-based heritage programmes, grassroots cultural activities and heritage festivals. This will contribute to strengthening our sense of belonging and national identity.

Moving Forward to Preserve our Heritage

16 The survey findings are positive and very encouraging. The findings indicate that NHB is on the right track but more could be and should be done for heritage preservation. However, heritage preservation and education should not be just a government's job. As citizens, we need to join hands to ensure that we learn to love our rich heritage. We need the active participation and support of the Public, Private and People sectors working together to ensure that there is a concerted and integrated approach to heritage preservation and promotion.

17 Hence I would like to thank all the sponsors and supporters for the HeritageFest 2007. I also would like to encourage more people to contribute to our heritage causes. Besides sponsorships and funding, we also need people to volunteer for heritage causes, become a

museum guide, attend heritage events or visit museums more frequently. Visits to our museums are wonderful opportunities to learn about our heritage. As Singaporeans we must be fully exposed to our diverse heritage so as to better appreciate and understand our multicultural environment and better prepare ourselves for a globalised world.

Conclusion

18 In conclusion, I thank you for joining us today to launch HeritageFest 2007. This is a festival of stories, your stories. Each and every Singaporean has contributed towards the continuing Singapore Story thus far. Let us continue to write the future chapters together. I hope that this festival will rekindle the tradition of story-telling and sharing of memories as this is one way of keeping our history and heritage alive and relevant to our future

19 It is now my pleasure to declare Singapore HeritageFest 2007 open.