WELCOME SPEECH BY PROFESSOR TOMMY KOH
CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD
AT THE LAUNCH OF SINGAPORE HERITAGEFEST 2006
AT TROPICS ATRIUM, SUNTEC CITY
ON WEDNESDAY, 12TH JULY 2006

Dr Lee Boon Yang, Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

1 Welcome to the launch of Singapore HeritageFest 2006.

2 The Singapore HeritageFest turns three this year. Despite its youth, the Festival has enjoyed tremendous support from all segments of society – citizens and non-citizens, residents and visitors, young and old. 900,000 people from all walks of life visited the Festival last year, an increase of 45% over 2004. Our commissioned survey showed that 90% of the 1,100 respondents increased their awareness of Singapore's history and heritage after visiting the Festival and would like to come back again. The Festival was nominated for the 19th Singapore Tourism Awards in its inaugural year and was one of the 3 finalists in 2005. We hope to do even better this year.

3 I want to talk about three things this morning. First, why we started the Singapore HeritageFest. Second, what to expect this year. Third, what are our long-term plans for the Festival and the Board's plans for heritage promotion beyond our museums.

Why Singapore HeritageFest?

4 The Singapore HeritageFest aims to raise awareness of our multi-cultural heritage among Singaporeans and promote inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue and understanding. We live in a troubled world. In many parts of the world, tension and conflict exist between members of different ethnic and religious groups. We read recently of surveys in Europe which show an increasing gap between the mainstream and the Muslim citizens. In

the case of Iraq, the trouble-makers are trying to provoke a civil war between the Sunnis and the Shias. Singapore is one of the few places in the world where people of different ethnic and religious groups live together in harmony and mutual respect. This is a precious achievement which we should treasure.

What To Expect At Singapore HeritageFest 2006

5 So, what can we expect this year? The theme for this year's festival is "Identity". We will explore this at five different levels: what makes us unique individuals and what our identity is vis-à-vis our family, community, nation and at the larger regional and global levels. All these aspects will be covered in our festival hub activities, exhibitions and outreach events.

6 For the first time this year, we are not prescribing the correct answers. Instead, we are asking questions to set everyone thinking about our identity and challenging everyone to reflect about ourselves and what makes us the unique individuals we are.

7 Another special feature of this Festival is the introduction of science in the exploration of our heritage. We will explore our Singaporean biological and genetic heritage through biometrics and DNA analysis.

8 Also, for the first time there will be a public talk on the search for a Singapore DNA Tree by Professor Chia Tet Fatt, a lecturer at the National Institute of Education. Professor Chia has discovered that Singaporeans share three of the seven DNA groups identified in the Western Hemisphere, and that we have a common DNA thread that binds us regardless of whether we are Chinese, Malay, Indian or Eurasian. There will also be a public forum on what makes a Singaporean a Singaporean.

9 The popular "Fun on Foot", the ethnic treasure hunt, as well as Expedition "H" heritage bus tours have been brought back. This year we have

put together 9 new trails that will take us to visit the lesser-known groups within the Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian communities. Here, you can interact with members of these smaller communities, such as the Henghua (Xinghua) who hail from Putian, a coastal city in Fujian province, China; the Telugus who hail from Andhra Pradesh a state of South India; and the Boyanese from the island of Bawean located 120km north of Surabaya, Indonesia, to highlight a few. We have also arranged for you to meet the various groups within the Eurasian community. Through this first-hand interaction, you can learn more about their culture, cuisine and costumes.

Future Plans of the Festival and Outreach Efforts

10 Let me now turn to my third point – our future plans for the Festival and outreach activities. The Singapore HeritageFest is the National Heritage Board's biggest annual outreach event. We have plans to grow it eventually to an iconic event that Singaporeans and visitors will look forward to. Through this festival, we want to take a holistic look at heritage in its widest sense, from biological and natural heritage to cultural and architectural heritage.

11 This is also the approach that NHB will take in our growing outreach efforts. We are planning to bring out more heritage-related publications and magazines on our diverse heritage aimed not at the elite but the ordinary people , work with the community to bring travelling exhibitions and programmes to the heartland and mark more historic sites and heritage trails. We have also just embarked on a five-year plan to document and promote our intangible heritage. Our aim is to increase our reach from 1.3 million today to 2 million people by 2008.

Thanks to Sponsors, etc

12 I would now like to thank our generous sponsors, without whose cash and in-kind sponsorships, this festival would not have been possible. Here I am happy to announce that the cash sponsorship this year saw a 200%

improvement. To us, this means that more of our partners and associates are seeing the value in the festival and the heritage promotion we do.

13 Our biggest thanks go to our main sponsors, the Singapore Totalisator Board and Philip Morris for their generous cash sponsorship. We also want to thank the Central Singapore Community Development Council, Lee Foundation, Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, Pioneer Electronics and Team Singapore for their generous cash sponsorships.

14 To Suntec City, which has given us venue sponsorship over these past three years, our sincere thanks. Our thanks also go to the members of the Festival Steering Committee, who have helped us shape this event. My special thanks also go to the Malaysian and Sri Lankan High Commissions for flying in and hosting the performers from their respective countries. I thank the Malaysian High Commissioner, Dato' Param, for joining us this morning.

15 My thanks to all our more than 180 in-kind sponsors and partners who have helped us fill our goody bags, been our resource people, and helped behind the scenes. A big thank you to all.

16 Finally, my thanks to our Guest of Honour, Dr Lee Boon Yang, and to all our distinguished guests for being here this morning.

17 Thank you.

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