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**SPEECH BY MR TEO CHEE HEAN, MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
AND MINISTER IN CHARGE OF THE CIVIL SERVICE
AT THE PUBLIC SERVICE EXHIBITION
HDB HUB ON 15 NOVEMBER 2006 AT 11.00 AM**

Distinguished Guests
Members of the Public Service
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning. I am happy to join you in the launch of this exhibition, "Building Our Singapore – The Public Service in Action".

Vital Role of the Public Service

2 The Public Service plays a vital role in the lives of Singaporeans. Public officers, working in the 15 Ministries, 9 organs of state and more than 60 Statutory Boards, serve in many different ways. Quietly and tirelessly, they have been keeping our country and homes safe; developing an attractive business environment to create jobs and opportunities; building a good living environment; educating our young and training our workers,

meeting the healthcare needs of citizens, ensuring that the underprivileged are not left behind and so on.

Growing Challenge in Meeting Citizen Needs

3 These are core functions of the Public Service, delivered with dedication and commitment since our independence. Yet, making sure that these functions are carried out effectively and efficiently is becoming more complex and challenging. Externally, we face keener competition for investments, jobs and talent, especially with the parallel rise of China and India. Complex transnational issues like terrorism and epidemics are now the norm. Internally, the needs and expectations of Singaporeans are rising and becoming more diverse. Some Singaporeans do have difficulty coping with economic restructuring. Our society, as a whole, is undergoing a generational change, with post-independent Singaporeans now making up more than half of our citizen population. Our population is growing older.

Innovating to Meet Rising Expectations

4 To continue to serve Singapore and Singaporeans well, the Public Service must understand the ramifications of these developments. And it is not good enough just to respond every time there is a new requirement. Instead, public officers must also anticipate change, and change before change is forced upon us. To keep up with rising public expectations for example, public officers must continually innovate and find new ways to provide quality service. We need to engage and involve the public in what we do, so that the outcomes are better and more satisfying for public officers and the public.

5 Some of the innovations are on display at the Exhibition illustrate what the Public Service has done in recent years. Take for example the Enhanced Immigration Automated Clearance System. This is the first immigration system in the world to use passport and fingerprint verification to automatically clear travellers. It will not only improve security, but will also allow for swifter clearance, making it easier for visitors and Singaporeans alike. Also on display is the “Enterprise One” online portal which enables businesses to obtain all their licences under one roof.

6 These two projects are Gold winners of the inaugural TEC Public Service Innovation Awards given by The Enterprise Challenge, an initiative of the Prime Minister's Office. I would like to congratulate all the 12 winning agencies for their enthusiasm and tireless pursuit in their innovation journey. I look forward to seeing many more such innovations in the years to come.

Leveraging on IT

7 Both the examples I cited also illustrate how we can leverage on IT to deliver quality service. Today, many public services are conveniently available on-line. We now have some 150 Government services available through mobile devices. You can check your CPF account, COE results and traffic conditions while on the move. The Government will continue to extend the reach of its services through convenient channels. By 2008, we aim to make close to 300 Government services available on your mobile devices.

More Choices to Meet Diverse Needs

8 One-size-fits-all prescriptions, even if they are of high quality, are no longer enough. More choices need to be provided to meet the diverse needs of Singaporeans. This has already happened in the area of education, where we now have multiple pathways within the MOE system as well as the Sports School and soon Arts School outside of the MOE system and private schools as well. Public housing is another example. From standard no-frills flats, we went on to provide design-and-build flats, studio apartments for the elderly and now even privately developed HDB flats.

9 Earlier, I mentioned how the Public Service had made use of IT to improve its service. In doing this, we have not forgotten citizens who are less IT savvy. There are today 5 CitizensConnect Centres at community clubs where citizens receive assistance to transact with the Government online. I am happy to announce that 22 more have just been added island-wide. Some 20 of these centres are in our community centres and clubs. The other two are at the CPF Board's Service Centre in Jurong and the IRAS office at Novena, both of which are high traffic Government offices.

Engaging Citizens in Developing Solutions

10 Given the more complex environment, public officers should leverage on the capabilities and strengths of our people. Many of our citizens have the desire and ability to contribute to public policy making and public service improvements. I am therefore pleased that public consultation is now part and parcel of public officers' major policy initiatives. Increasingly, citizen comments are sought on policy and legislative changes. Feedback is systematically solicited from a wide spectrum of Singaporeans on both local and national issues. This has improved policy making and service provision in Government.

11 These need not be major or complex policy issues. If I may take an example from our schools. The formation of Parents' Support Groups in our schools is a win-win way of getting parents involved in the education of their children, and tapping on their considerable knowledge, experience and enthusiasm to widen the resources that are available to the school. These can come in the form of help in career guidance, CCA, and even to manage traffic around the school to improve safety. The thought of engaging and involving parents in the school was initially received with trepidation by some teachers, but is now warmly received and appreciated.

12 There are many more examples: in social service, in the environment, in dealing with grassroots matters that affect our daily lives, such as helping to control mosquito breeding and dengue.

Public Service Exhibition

13 I will not be able to mention all the efforts made by the Public Service to meet the changing needs of our citizens. Nor is it possible for me to cite all of the projects where public officers worked hand in hand with citizens.

14 Some examples of these many efforts are showcased today at this Exhibition. Close to 50 exhibits are on display. Many have been selected by public officers themselves as worthy of sharing. As you journey through the exhibits, you will get a glimpse of the formidable task facing public officers everyday as they work to make Singapore tick. For some of these tasks, we may not even be aware that there is a public officer working tirelessly behind the scene.

15 The Singapore Public Service has come a long way, building Singapore along with us and for us. Whether it is providing a world-class living environment, fostering pro-enterprise initiatives or bringing out the best in Singaporeans, the contribution from every public officer has made some impact on our lives at some point in time. This Exhibition is but a small example of the Public Service's commitment to making Singapore our best home. Let us all continue to work together to build a bright future for Singapore.

16 Thank you

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