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**SPEECH BY DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER,
MINISTER IN CHARGE OF THE CIVIL SERVICE AND
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE MR TEO CHEE HEAN
AT THE EXCELLENCE IN PUBLIC SERVICE AWARDS
ON 21 MAY 2010 AT THE SHERATON TOWERS HOTEL GRAND
BALLROOM**

Distinguished Guests,
Public Officers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good evening.

A year ago, many economies the world over were preparing themselves for a protracted and deep recession with no end in sight. Today, notwithstanding the economic crisis in Greece, the world economy appears to be enroute to a remarkable recovery. Global trade flows have rebounded from the lows in 2009, and the World Trade Organisation has projected trade to grow by 9.5% in 2010¹.

Singapore too has recovered well from the economic crisis. The Singapore economy has registered an impressive 15.5% growth in the first quarter of this year, and is projected to grow by 7% to 9% for 2010². This strong turnaround can be attributed, in part, to the Singapore Public Service which took on the challenges and difficulties of 2009 with great resolve and fortitude. Working together with the political leadership, a collective effort was made to find practical solutions to the challenges.

This ability to work as one networked government is one of the reasons why the Singapore Public Service is effective and distinctive compared to many other public services in the world. We must remain committed to serving and engaging our citizens as best as we can. To do so, we need public officers who are willing to go the extra mile, and public sector organisations that will constantly seek new ways to improve and innovate, and to create greater value for the public.

Excellence in Public Service Awards

One of the objectives of the Public Service Week is to celebrate our achievements as a Public Service. This evening's awards ceremony will salute more than three hundred and two (302) organisations and individuals for their achievements in organisational and service excellence.

Organisational Excellence

The Public Service Excellence Award recognises public agencies that have attained best-in-class business excellence standards. This is a commitment by our public agencies to be on par with the best organisations in the private and non-governmental sectors.

Tonight we will be giving out this award to one hundred and ninety (190) agencies.

¹ MTI Revises 2010 Growth Forecast to 7.0 to 9.0 Per Cent, 14 April 2010.

² 2010 GDP Forecast maintained at 7.0 to 9.0 percent, MTI Press release, 20 May 2010.

This year, the Best Practice Award has also been introduced to recognise innovative and effective practices in specific areas of governance. Six agencies have been conferred this award for areas ranging from resource management, stakeholder engagement and regulations.

One example in the resource management area is what the Housing and Development Board (HDB) has done to meet increasing demand for rental housing. HDB came up with the idea of converting vacant 3 & 4-room blocks which are pending demolition, for redevelopment to 1 & 2-room rental blocks to increase its rental stock. The increase in supply of rental flats has benefitted 1,850 households on the rental waiting list. Some vacant 3- & 4-room blocks are also used to implement Interim Rental Housing for Singaporeans in need of urgent temporary shelter. Through the initiative, HDB has been able to reduce the waiting time for deserving rental flat applicants from 21 to 12 months.

Let me cite an example on the business front. All factories were previously required to be registered under the Factory Registration System with the Ministry of Manpower before they could start operations. This system did not differentiate lower risk factories from the rest, and cost every factory \$250 for each registration. In November 2008, MOM exempted lower risk factories from applying for such licences. They are now required to only make an online declaration that they have implemented risk management at their workplaces. This risk-based approach has benefitted close to 14,000, or two-thirds of all factories in Singapore. Together, these factories reap annual cost savings of about \$3.5 million, as well as savings in administrative costs. This initiative clearly shows that we do not need to compromise on quality, standards or regulatory systems when we make it easier for people to do business in Singapore.

Let me congratulate the agencies and their officers for their relentless pursuit of excellence and innovation. As we face increasing resource constraints, public agencies should facilitate Singapore's drive towards productivity by simplifying administration and reducing the cost burden to businesses. Public agencies must also strengthen their management systems and processes so that we have the capacity to anticipate and handle all sorts of challenges.

Individual Excellence in Service

At the individual level, we will be giving out two awards to public officers who have provided outstanding service. The PS21 Star Service Award recognises public officers who have consistently demonstrated high standards of service excellence.

Our Public Service exists to serve Singapore and Singaporeans. It is not enough for us to have well-crafted policies. Good policy implementation is even more important. This is why our public-facing officers have a critical role to play in ensuring that our policies are well explained to our citizens and well implemented on the ground. We need public officers who will take the initiative, anticipate needs and concerns of the public, and constantly challenge themselves to better serve them.

In this regard, the pinnacle PS21 Distinguished Star Service Award is conferred on nine officers who have gone out of their way to help citizens resolve their issues.

These officers have also shown a dedication to serve the public beyond the call of duty.

One such public officer is Mr Jackson Seow, from Gan Eng Seng Primary School. Throughout his years in the school, Jackson has often gone out of his way to help his pupils. In one particular instance, he took time to counsel a student who had been caught stealing from classrooms. When he found out that the student came from a poor family and suffered from a lack of guidance, he sacrificed many hours after school to work with the student and his family. Despite a further stealing incident, Jackson did not give up on the student. His persistence eventually saw the boy mending his ways to never steal again. We have often heard of teachers telling their charges to 'not give up' on their studies. Here is an instance of a teacher applying the same spirit with a wonderful outcome.

Another example is Ms Joanne Lee, a Tax Officer with the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore. While most of us would dread a call from the tax department, a tax payer and his employer were actually grateful to get a call from Joanne. The employer had withheld the salary of a foreign staff who needed to leave Singapore urgently. Joanne spent a considerable time explaining the tax clearance procedures to the employer and guided him to resources and information so he could better appreciate tax clearance requirements for foreign employees.

The personal commitment and drive of public officers like Jackson and Joanne are reasons why the Singapore Public Service is highly regarded throughout the world. I hope their good work will be an inspiration to other public officers. Please join me in congratulating all the Star Service winners. Well done!

Star Customer Awards

This evening, we are also acknowledging the contributions of a very special group of people. They are not staff of public agencies. These are customers. Like the saying "it takes two hands to clap", customers are the other half of the equation in creating a great service experience. Citizens share the responsibility for creating public outcomes with the Government. The relationship between the Government and citizens should be a dynamic, interactive and collaborative one.

The five exemplary Star Customers honoured today have made significant contributions to helping the Public Service improve its service delivery.

Mr Kelvin Lin is one of them. The Police wanted to raise awareness of crime prevention among residents of Almond Estate, but faced some difficulties engaging them. Mr Lin - who is not a community volunteer or grassroots leader – rallied the residents in the estate to take ownership of the safety and security of their neighbourhood, and helped spread crime prevention messages. He also brainstormed ideas to enhance the safety and security of the neighbourhood and worked with the Police to implement the ideas.

As you can see from the examples cited, we can all be proud of our Public Service. We have good people in the Service, people who are capable and committed. We have excellent organisations which are relentless with their pursuit for better outcomes.

We also have thoughtful and helpful citizens and residents. I thank all the winners for their dedication to Singapore. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank all the judges of the various awards for lending your time and expertise to select the winners.

Book on the Public Service

As we congratulate our agencies and officers on their achievements today, we are also taking the opportunity to record and recognise the officers who came before us. The Singapore Public Service has a 50-year history, counting from the time Singapore became self-governing in 1959. Over the years, thousands of officers have worked hard to lay the foundations for Singapore's success. Their good work has been captured in a new book, entitled "Pioneers Once More – The Singapore Public Service 1959 to 2009".

Commissioned by the Public Service Division, and jointly published by PSD and the Straits Times Press, this book tells the story of the Public Service through the voices of the many officers who have played a part, big and small, in shaping it. This book is about ordinary Singaporeans who are prepared to do the extra-ordinary for Singapore. For them, each day ends with the quiet satisfaction of a job well done, and of the people they have helped.

Fifty years of metamorphosis is not easy to capture. Many officers, including those who have retired, have helped in the making of this book. I would like to congratulate the author Ms Chua Mui Hoong from Straits Times and all those involved in the three-year journey of producing this book. I encourage you to get a copy of the book. I am sure you will be inspired by the stories.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to leave you with this thought: Though the Public Service is a diverse organisation with some 124,000 officers working in 15 ministries, 9 organs of state and more than 50 statutory boards, we all share a common goal – and that is to secure a brighter future for all Singaporeans.

The tagline for this year's Public Service Week sums up this ethos: "The Singapore Public Service. Serving the Nation and Proud of it!" So let this remind us of our duty as public officers to always serve the nation with Integrity, Service and Excellence.

Thank you.