

**SPEECH BY RADM (NS) LUI TUCK YEW, ACTING MINISTER
FOR INFORMATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS AT
MICA DINNER AND DANCE 2009 ON FRIDAY, 5 JUNE 2009,
7.30PM AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM**

Minister George Yeo

Minister Mah Bow Tan

Dr Lee Boon Yang

Members of MICA Alumni,

Distinguished Guests,

Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1 Good evening and welcome to the MICA Dinner and Dance 2009. To my MICA colleagues, I am happy to see you all dressed up and getting into the spirit of the event. To our former colleagues, I would like to extend my thanks to you for accepting our invitation. Your presence has made this year's Dinner and Dance more special, as we commemorate MICA's 50th Anniversary. I believe this is the first time where several generations of the MICA family are seated together.

2 Exactly 50 years ago this day, the forerunner of MICA, the Ministry of Culture was formed with Mr Rajaratnam as its

minister. We were one of the first ministries to be formed when Singapore attained self governance and the cabinet with Mr Lee Kuan Yew as Prime Minister and 9 other ministers sworn in on 5 June 1959. It was a momentous occasion - after 140 years of colonial rule, we finally were responsible for charting our own future and determining our own destiny.

3 Many countries in Asia and Africa attained independence or self governance during the tumultuous period in the 50s and 60s. We were similar to them in many ways and yet, we differentiated ourselves from the start. Our streets and rivers were dirty but we had clean hands. We had flimsy huts to shelter our families but we had stout hearts to overcome the many challenges we faced, turning obstacles into opportunities. Indeed, we had no resources save a hardworking, determined and thrifty people.

4 Our early years were difficult. We started with a per capita income of US\$400. We faced wide-ranging problems – significant unemployment, a considerable housing shortage and a high illiteracy rate. The Government's immediate concern was to create a livelihood for 2 million Singaporeans and in doing so,

to give them hope for the future. Our very survival was at stake with the communist threat and then Konfrontasi threatening us. It was a trying, testing period for our forefathers.

5 Over the years, we have turned mayday into payday as the standard of living rose for all Singaporeans with improved healthcare, affordable housing, quality education and better jobs. A recent index produced by the Caux Round Table and published in the Straits Times on Monday revealed Singapore's economic and social progress have made it the highest ranked Asian state in a global index of social capital. Social capital is computed averaging scores across 14 different measurements of economic activity, quality of life and legal and political institutions. Singapore came in at 14th position, ahead of the United States and Britain, but behind several Nordic countries, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

6 Through hard work and sound policies, we have made significant progress in transforming our city state into a first world nation. We have created a first class living environment to work and raise a family in. We have shaped a society that is increasingly vibrant, diverse, gracious and open. We have

become a notable global hub for trade, a trusted destination for businesses and investment, a magnet and an oasis for talent.

7 When we look back on the progress we have made, we take heart and draw strength from how we have overcome adversity together and succeeded against the odds in the past and we will surely do so once more against the current economic challenges which are as daunting as those in our early years. Our fundamentals are sound and as PM mentioned in his May Day Rally Speech, we have many programmes underway to build a better Singapore. Amongst these are an enhanced public transportation network, new and renewed public housing estates, additional hospitals and educational institutions and the integrated resorts that will transform Marina Bay and Sentosa.

8 The 50th year of self governance is an important milestone. As a nation, we should commemorate this milestone in meaningful ways. We have formed an inter-agency steering committee which I chair and decided to adopt “Our Home, Our Future, Our Singapore” as the tagline. This is not another campaign. Rather, it is a collective effort using key milestones of ongoing projects and other national activities and events to

ponder on the transformation that Singapore has gone through, reflect on why we have succeeded and draw lessons on how we can best position ourselves as one united people for the future.

9 Over the past 50 years, the face of Singapore has been transformed. We all have our favourite examples to illustrate the physical transformation Singapore has undergone. The example that I have chosen to briefly refer to is one which MICA is closely associated with – the Esplanade.

10 Originally, the Esplanade was just a simple recreational park and the venue of Singapore's largest congregation of satay stalls. Today, it is better known as a world renowned performing arts centre bringing together leading artistes and top performances both local and foreign. It remains a place accessible to all, whether to enjoy a performance, a simple evening stroll with friends and loved ones or to sample the rich variety of good food.

11 It is difficult to envision a Singapore without the Esplanade. It exemplifies what we can achieve when we dare dream big dreams; dreams that have helped enhanced this country's

reputation as a distinctive global city, dreams that have transformed the way we live.

12 MICA has also played a crucial role in transforming the cultural landscape in Singapore. Our earliest responsibilities were to create a common culture, eliminate communal divisions, foster a sense of national identity and engage people in our nation building efforts. We then moved into campaign planning and many of us will remember the 'Keep Singapore Clean', 'Family Planning', 'Courtesy' and 'Speak Mandarin' campaigns.

13 Promoting the arts and learning were important from the start. The National Library, with its roots dating back to the Singapore Institution in 1823, has come a long way to its beautiful home in Victoria Street today. This iconic building of knowledge continues to serve the learning needs of Singaporeans. The forerunner of the Singapore Arts Festival started in 1977 and today's version 32 years later is a resounding success. 20 years ago, the Advisory Council for Culture and Arts was formed and some of their impactful recommendations included the establishment of the SAM, ACM and the Esplanade Theatres. 5 years hence, we will have a

dedicated National Arts Gallery using the City Hall and part of MICA will return once more to where it all started.

14 MICA has also contributed to turn Singapore into an intelligent and connected nation. Pioneering efforts in the 1980s gave us a headstart in the use of ICT. We started to wire-up the whole of Singapore in 1995. This was followed by the full liberalisation of the telecomms sector a few years later. Going forward, the iN2015 masterplan and the NGNBN project, under the supervision of IDA, will strengthen Singapore's position as a competitive, vibrant infocomms hub. Likewise, the media industry is once again being revitalised and MDA has ambitious intentions to transform this sector under its Singapore Media Fusion Plan and to build a top-class Mediapolis.

15 By and by, Singapore was transformed. Even as I speak about transformation, it is apt that we are holding tonight's event here at the National Museum, one of Singapore's most treasured buildings, lovingly preserved and one of our foremost cultural icons. It was opened 122 years ago to mark the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria. Tonight, we mark a different Jubilee in this

same building that has been painstakingly restored and redeveloped to surpass its original splendour.

13 The purpose of this evening's dinner is not just to recall the past, no matter how interesting and exciting it might have been. Nor is it just an occasion to pay tribute to the contributions and achievements of the many men and women who have helped shape MICA and Singapore to be what we are today. Above all, it is an occasion to remind and charge this present generation of the precious legacy entrusted to our hands and the need for each of us to add our touch to the shared vision of growing Singapore into a vibrant global city, a gracious community populated by creative people. So that in the years to come, every time we look back, we too can join our predecessors to savour anew the unity of purpose amidst the toil, look with quiet satisfaction at the fruits of our labour and may that inspire others who follow after us to even greater heights of achievement.

Thank you and have an enjoyable evening ahead.