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**SPEECH BY DR. LEE BOON YANG**  
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**AT LAUNCH OF INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM DAY 2007**  
**ON 18 MAY, 3PM AT NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE**

Mr Michael Koh, CEO, National Heritage Board,

Members of the Museum Roundtable,

Ladies and gentlemen.

Good afternoon

1 I am pleased to join you for the launch of International Museum Day 2007. Since 1977, museums around the world have been celebrating the International Museum Day, with events such as music, dance and theatre performances as well as exhibitions to celebrate heritage and culture.

2 For this year's International Museum Day, we have 24 museums offering more than 80 interesting and exciting events to bring museums closer to our people. For the next 10 days, Singaporeans and visitors

can see for themselves how our museums have come alive as unique heritage institutions.

### A Museum Renaissance

3 In this digital age where people can see and read about practically anything on-line, you may ask if there is a place or role for museums. I would say that museums remain just as relevant today as before the advent of internet. Museums are key institutions that preserve a nation's heritage, forge national identities and promote goodwill through international cultural exchanges. The challenge for museums is to ride on pervasive digital technology to engage the audience.

4 Today, we are in the midst of an exciting museum revolution. Museums all over the world are reinventing and repositioning themselves from being mere repositories of artefacts and artworks to becoming experience-rich cultural destinations. Museums are also leveraging on the best practices and digital technologies to their advantage.

5 Take for instance the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Their Fashion in Motion series of live catwalk events showcases some of the works of the greatest designers of our time against the beautiful

backdrop of the museum. Another example is the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the Smithsonian's museum of international modern and contemporary art. Based in Washington, the museum allows one to enjoy late night exhibition viewings, sip cocktails, or even dance outdoors to the music of one of the hottest DJs in the club circuit.

6 In Singapore, our museums are also reinventing themselves. For instance, the National Museum is setting new standards in engaging, educating and entertaining visitors through the innovative use of technology. Its programming has also gone beyond exhibitions to include films and even performances that reflect the diverse heritages and histories. Its contemporary programming has also succeeded in drawing new museum-goers, including the younger crowds.

7 Similarly, our internationally-acclaimed Asian Civilisations Museum has won rave reviews from visitors all over the world for its well curated exhibitions and thoughtful programming. Jack Lohman, Director of the Museum of London Group and Chairman of the UK unit of the International Council of Museums described ACM as "a museum of the future" in Reuters last year, while Newsweek called it "arguably the best museum in town." Other museums like the Singapore Science Centre, Singapore Discovery Centre, and red-dot Design Museum have won

similar reviews by employing state-of-the-art technology to make museum experiences more vivid and enjoyable.

8 In recent years, Singapore has also witnessed the emergence of several private museums offering fresh perspectives and dimensions to our heritage scene. Most are a labour of love by collectors or non-profit institutions. While these museums are often small in size and scale, they play a vital role in expanding and adding diversity to our network of museums and fostering a stronger community spirit and passion for heritage. Together with our public museums, they contribute to raising the international profile of Singapore as a global city for arts and culture.

9 Today, we have 45 museums in Singapore. In the financial year 2006, we hit a new high of 4.3 million visitors for 44 museums. This is a big increase when compared to the visitorship of two million visiting 26 museums in financial year 2003. It shows that our museum, public and private, are gaining mindshare and winning supporters which will go a long way to strengthening our sense of identity and pride in our heritage and history.

## Launch of Singapore Collections Online

10 As I mentioned earlier, a challenge for heritage museums is to move in line with the changing economic and social landscapes brought about by the digital revolution. While our museums continue to attract visitors, it is also important that we leverage on the power of the Internet to reach out to even more people. The National Heritage Board has taken a step in this direction by creating an online heritage portal. To make our collections more accessible to Singaporeans and the international audience at large, it has developed Singapore **CO**llections **On**Line or SGCOOL (SG-COOL) for short. This online resource ([www.sgcool.sg](http://www.sgcool.sg)) allows the public to access and view digital images of artefacts and artworks from the comfort of their own homes.

11 Among the online resources are artefacts from the NHB and other museums' collections such as NUS Museum and the Tang Shipwreck Treasures including iconic works such as the portrait of Sir Frank Athelstane Swettenham by celebrated portrait artist John Singer Sargent (one of the highest valued artefact in our collection), and the Kushana Buddha, one of only six such Buddhas in the world. In time to come, I hope the on-line collection will grow from its current 6,000 images to cover all our museums' collections. The public may also be able to purchase digital images of their favourite artwork or artefact on SGCOOL.

## Launch of Tours

12 We recognise that apart from the public sector, heritage development also requires the support of the people and private sectors. The next phase of our Renaissance City Plan will focus on a 3P or public-people-private partnership approach.

13 In line with this approach, NHB is working closely with the Singapore Tourism Board and established tour operators Luxury Tours, City Tours and Ducktours, to launch four new tour products specialising in museums and heritage. These tours cover colourful sights of Little India and Chinatown, the historic civic district, visits to the museums, bumboat cruise along the Singapore River and a World War II tour with visits to historical battle sites. While these tours currently only cover the NHB museums, we hope the operators will soon roll out new tours to other museums of the Museum Roundtable. I am confident that these private-sector efforts will add greater vibrancy and lifestyle appeal to our heritage sector. Let me now wish our three partners City Tours, Luxury Tours and Ducktours every success as they launch their tours over the next two months.

## Conclusion

14 On this note, I wish to thank our partners City Development Limited, Singapore Tourism Board and the 24 Museum Roundtable members for supporting this year's International Museum Day celebrations. I hope that many more friends from the private and people sectors will step forward to join NHB in making museum-going a fun part of everyday life. In the long run, such efforts help to further transform Singapore into an attractive, creative and inspiring city for all.

It is now my pleasure to declare the International Museum Day 2007 open.

Thank you.