

Document: Speech by Council Member
Singapore Business Federation,
Mr. Tang Kin Fei

His Excellency, Dr Mohammad Nahavandian President, Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines

His Excellency Gopinath Pillai (pronounced Go-pi-na Pi-lay), Ambassador to Iran,

Distinguished Guests,

Friends from Iran,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning and a warm welcome to everyone present at today's "Business Opportunities in Iran Seminar and business matching session."

As many of you know, the bilateral relationships between the business communities in Singapore and Iran are excellent and multifaceted and we are glad to be receiving our Iranian friends in Singapore.

The Iran was Singapore's 30th largest trading partner in 2007. Trade totaled S\$2.83 million, a decrease of 0.01% from 2006 and I am confident that the trade figures will continue to grow exponentially.

The current Middle Eastern Countries have embarked on an economic diversification program, thus reducing their heavy dependence on the oil and gas revenue. This diversification program has brought about many opportunities in many key industries.

With Singapore companies becoming more familiar with the Middle East and are keen on the many opportunities it can offer to them. They can in turn offer different services in various aspects including, construction, tourism and hotels, transport, general trading, retail and services, agro-industries trading, etc.

Against this upbeat backdrop of growing opportunities in the Middle East and with Singapore companies becoming more familiar with the Middle East and embarking on their internationalisation path, we see the need to provide the various much needed business knowledge and expertise for exploration of business opportunities and to assist them in their decision making.

Today's seminar is part of the Middle East Business Group's (MEBG) effort to help the two business communities in their area of internationalization into the two regions respectively.

Let me share more about the MEBG with you. The establishment of Singapore Business Federation's *Middle East Business Group* to engage and in particular, to assist our businesses in their foray into the Middle East region, we have since its conception day to its official launch in April 2007, more than 400 active MEBG members from a wide and diverse range of industries in Singapore such as construction, IT, manufacturing, trading, real estate, logistics, design and financial services.

I will briefly take you through the main roles which the Middle East Business Group can assist to explore and facilitate our businesses with the partnership and further deepened to assist them.

MEBG frequently organizes exploratory business missions to the MENA and Africa regions for companies that are new to these markets and would like to have a first-hand experience in it to scope for suitable business climates and conditions. Since 2004, SBF has led **14** missions to **14 countries** in the Middle East and North Africa region covering all the major countries from Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Oman, UAE, Iran, Algeria, Egypt, to Libya etc. The latest business mission to Iran in May 2005 was highly successful with participating business delegates benefiting greatly from the networking platform which SBF has paved for them during these business missions

Our next step after the initial exploration would be to gain more in-depth knowledge about various issues pertaining to doing business in the MENA region which MEBG has periodically organized such seminars and workshops to educate, inform and update our members on issues such as taxation, business cultures and business opportunities.

The most important and valuable service MEBG provides *members is the opportunity to network and identify projects*. These are possible through inbound delegations where business matching sessions are organized and projects are highlighted to our business community. SBF has received over **40** visiting delegations from **13 MENA countries** in the past 4 years.

Lastly MEBG will serve as a platform to support our member companies by providing feedback & business requirements and corresponding closely with governmental bodies, both locally and overseas. Our close relationship with our counterpart chambers also serves as a key contact point for our members and so far we have signed **17** cooperation agreements with our counterpart chambers in the Middle East.

Some **1,500** SBF members have benefited from our activities and the total value of

business, directly or indirectly attributable to SBF MEBG's activities and efforts is close to **S\$4.9 billion**.

Let me conclude by saying that throughout the years, changing circumstances have forced Singapore to change to stay relevant and ahead of many and in the new century with the playing field getting more crowded with more economies. No doubt, the Middle East will remain a compelling location situated in the centre of a fast growing world

economy and we have to understand the obstacles we will need to face and conquer along the way. Last but not least, Singapore Business Federation remains committed to promoting bilateral ties between Singapore and the region to facilitate our business community into the region.

I wish you all the best as you go ahead to explore new opportunities, and hopefully blaze new trails to success.

May I now invite His Excellency Dr Nahavandian to deliver his welcome address please.

Thank you.