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SPEECH BY MR LUI TUCK YEW, ACTING MINISTER FOR INFORMATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS, AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF 'TREASURY OF THE WORLD: JEWELLED ARTS OF INDIA IN THE AGE OF THE MUGHALS', ON THURSDAY 11 FEBRUARY 2010, 7:10PM, AT THE ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

Guest-of-Honour HE S R Nathan, President of the Republic of Singapore

HE Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, Minister for Oil and Information, Kuwait

Her Excellency Sheikha Hussah Sabah al-Salem al-Sabah

Mr George Yeo, Minister for Foreign Affairs

His Excellency Abdulaziz Ahmed Al-Adwani, Ambassador of Kuwait to Singapore

Professor Tommy Koh, Chairman, National Heritage Board

Friends from Kuwait

Excellencies and distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

1 A very good evening. I am delighted to be here this evening to witness the official opening of the 'Treasury of the World'. It is a major milestone in a long standing relationship between Kuwait and Singapore. Cross-cultural interactions have long been a part of Asia's history. Merchants from Arabia, Persia and other parts of the Middle East came to Asia to trade spices, porcelain and silk. In fact, Kuwaitis were among the earliest from the Gulf region to travel to Southeast Asia and Singapore. During the 1880s – not long after the time of the Mughals – Kuwaiti traders set sail to Southeast Asia, and some eventually settled in Singapore and have lived here for many generations.

2 Today, our exchange is in ideas, business, innovation and, of course, culture. This exhibition of *Treasury of the World* would not have been possible without the generosity of Sheikh Nasser Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah and his wife Sheikha

Hussah Sabah al-Salim al-Sabah from the Kuwaiti royal family. In this exhibition, you will see not just magnificent artefacts, but the enthusiasm and personal involvement of the owners of these Mughal treasures.

3 This year marks the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relationship between the State of Kuwait and Singapore. This is an active relationship founded on mutual respect and marked by frequent visits from both sides. For example, in 2004, the Emir of Kuwait His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited Singapore in his capacity then as Prime Minister. This was followed in 2007 by Kuwait's current Prime Minister, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah.

4 In 2008, Singapore's President Nathan, our guest-of-honour for this evening, made his first State Visit to a Gulf country when he visited Kuwait for the signing of the third Memorandum of Understanding between our countries. And just seven months ago, Kuwait's DPM for Economic Affairs HE Sheikh Ahmad Fahad called on Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong to explore investment opportunities and discuss bilateral cooperation¹.

5 This expansive relationship is further enhanced by a recently-concluded Open Skies Agreement² and the Investment Guarantee Agreement. This year, a Joint Committee for Cooperation between our foreign affairs ministries will be convened³ to promote cooperation in areas like trade and investment, energy and culture. We have also partnered closely in the area of information technology, where we were happy to contribute in the implementation of Kuwait's e-government⁴.

6 In terms of trade, Kuwait is Singapore's fourth largest trading partner in the Middle East, with total trade amounting to S\$4.2 billion in 2009. On a broader level, Kuwait and Singapore worked closely to conclude the FTA between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Singapore (GSFTA) in December 2008. Once

¹ http://app.mfa.gov.sg/2006/press/view_press.asp?post_id=5257

² http://app.mfa.gov.sg/pr/read_content.asp?View,11420,

³ http://app.mfa.gov.sg/2006/press/view_press.asp?post_id=5470

⁴ <http://www.ida.gov.sg/insg/post/Singapore-and-Kuwait-strengthen-e-Government-partnership.aspx>

ratified by all the GCC members, the GSFTA should further boost trade and investment between Singapore and Kuwait.

7 Social and cultural relations ties contribute much to the warm bilateral relations. For example, in 1997, the Asian Civilisations Museum showcased a collection of calligraphic materials from the Tareq Rajab Museum in an exhibition entitled “Harmony of Letters”. In 1998, 112 pieces were also extended to the Museum on a long-term loan, which was renewed twice and was returned at the end of May 2008.

8 This evening, we are deeply honoured to host yet another prestigious collection from Kuwait – the al-Sabah Collection. This is an important and internationally-renowned collection of Mughal art and artefacts. The ‘Treasury of the World’ exhibition has dazzled audiences at some of the most prestigious museums around the world, and Singapore is indeed privileged to be the venue for its Asian premiere. The Singapore public and visitors here now have a chance to experience its splendour at the Asian Civilisations Museum.

9 If we continue to have such active involvement and enthusiasm from our respective governments, our businesses and our museums, I am confident and hopeful of even stronger bilateral relations and opportunities for mutual benefit. An example is the upcoming 2nd ASEAN-GCC Ministerial Meeting later this year, where Kuwait and Singapore will be co-chairs.

10 Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Sheikh Nasser Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah and Sheikha Hussah Sabah al-Salem al-Sabah for sharing their precious and personal collection. My appreciation goes also to His Excellency Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, Minister for Oil and Information, Kuwait, and our friends from Kuwait for being with us tonight. I wish each and everyone a most enjoyable evening.
