

S'pore Flyer to be next 'necklace'

Marina Bay attraction will be world's largest moving and man-made land object

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THE first time Minister for National Development Mah Bow Tan heard the proposal for the Singapore Flyer, he thought to himself: "What's so great about it? It's just a bigger version of the Ferris wheel."

Yesterday, three years on, the Minister was officiating at the ground breaking ceremony of the attraction, which is slated for completion in 2008 — even before the integrated resorts (IR).

And of course, there was no trace of scepticism in the impromptu speech he gave before some 150 guests.

"They convinced me that this is not just a Ferris wheel and I liked their explanation," he said.

Now convinced that it will become "one of Asia's recognisable attractions", Mr Mah said the Singapore Flyer would add to the "necklace of attractions" in the Marina Bay, which include the Esplanade, the IR and the Business Financial Centre.

At 178m high, equivalent to a 45-storey building, it will be "the world's largest man-made, moving land object". In comparison, the London Eye stands at 135 metres.

On the giant Ferris wheel are 28 air-conditioned, UV-protected capsules, each of which can accommodate up to 35 people.

During the 37-minute ride, visitors will be treated to a panoramic view of the Singapore skyline from Changi Airport to Sentosa. On a clear day, they can even expect to see parts of Malaysia and Indonesia.

Said Mr Peter Purcell, managing director of Singapore Flyer Pte Ltd: "Alternatively, we can look at decking out these capsules as a *sushi* bar or function facility. The opportunities to do creative things are limited by only the imagination."

The \$240 million landmark will be open 16 hours a day. While the pricing structure is still being worked out, ticket prices are estimated at about \$26 to \$27 per person. Surrounding the wheel will be a 20-



GREAT START: (from left) NTUC Club CEO Chng Hee Kok, STB chief Lim Neo Chian, Minister Mah Bow Tan and Mr Peter Purcell were among others at the ground breaking ceremony of Singapore Flyer.

metre high, three-storey terminal building which will house a main shopping mall, a central atrium with "lush Asian rainforest and water features", a retail and entertainment centre, an *alfresco* waterfront dining promenade and an "open-air Greek Theatre concert bowl" for live performances.

Singapore Tourism Board (STB) chief Lim Neo Chian is expecting a visitorship exceeding 2 million annually, with tourists making up half the figure. This will go towards achieving STB's 10-year target of tripling tourism receipts and doubling visitor arrivals.

On how it will complement the upcoming IR, Mr Lim joked: "It will take about half an hour to go one round. The husband or the parents can go one round and yet have enough time to lose some money in the casino." Mr Purcell, however, found himself fending off more scepticism yesterday, this time from the reporters.

"The Eiffel Tower has been around for more than a hundred years and is still attracting 6 million visitors a year.

"This is not a new industry but one with a track record of more than a hundred years. People are fascinated by height," he said.

While domestic demand is "only one part of the puzzle", he had "no doubt, whatsoever, that the domestic market will be very interested.

"People will have the opportunity to see their city. Not everybody has a wonderful view in Singapore," he said.