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**SPEECH BY MDM HALIMAH YACOB
SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT
AT THE END OF THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES ON
BUDGET AND COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY 2017
9 MAR 2017 IN PARLIAMENT CHAMBERS**

Honourable Members,

Let me first start by saying that it was indeed a real pleasure to have our Minister for Finance Mr Heng Swee Keat back in Parliament to deliver the annual Budget Statement and also to address Members' concerns and queries in the Budget Debate. We are most thankful to him.

2 The Statement was delivered against the backdrop of a world in the grips of growing uncertainty in the global economy brought about by disruptive technologies and innovation, and the accompanying rise of populism and protectionist sentiments in a number of countries. Besides taking stock of the local and global economies, the Statement also set out to explain the various policies and programmes in a way that could resonate with people both inside and outside the House.

3 The Front Bench took pains to expand on their respective Ministries' plethora of programmes to prepare and assist Singaporeans to be future-ready to tackle the challenges ahead and chart the way forward, guided by the recommendations contained in the Report of the Committee on the Future Economy.

4 Be it digitisation or digitalisation, innovation technology, the Future@Work national training programme, 21st century competencies, nurturing the joy of learning in our students, developing entrepreneurial dare and developing deep skills and expertise, Ministers, Ministers of State and Parliamentary Secretaries took turns to flesh out and explain at length and in detail the complexities of each of their schemes and programmes to Members, who literally left no stone unturned to make sure that Singapore and Singaporeans' best interests are served.

5 I would like to commend all Members, both from the Front Bench and the Back Bench, for doing a great job and doing Singapore proud.

6 For those in the Front Bench, it is always good to be reminded of what our founding Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, had in mind when he said in Parliament on 23 October 1981, and I quote, “To be trusted by the people as the older leaders have been trusted, the young leaders must learn to translate these figures and hard-headed analyses of complex problems into warm, simple and human terms, terms which the ordinary people can understand”, unquote.

7 What shines through very clearly in this 2-week Debate is that while we look at the big picture and examine the details, Singapore and our fellow Singaporeans are never lost sight of but are always at the centre of it all. This is as it should be. There was that good mix of heart, head and the occasional humour. There was down-to-earth pragmatism as well as dashes of idealism and level-

headedness, always with two feet firmly on the ground. Compassion was never far away, with mutual respect, cordiality, rationality and reasonableness being unmistakable marks.

8 Some Members were visibly moved as they spoke of the plight and frustrations of Singaporeans facing difficulties in their lives. It shows the heavy burden that is on the shoulders of each Member. Although schemes are available, these unfortunate Singaporeans must be helped to avail of them, and thrown a lifeline if necessary. Help schemes must help.

9 There was also a noticeable convergence of views from both the Government and opposition when it comes to protecting our sovereignty. This coming together, for matters touching on the country's interests, can also be seen at overseas parliamentary meetings when Members are representing Singapore. Anyone following these debates would have also noticed that Members, some more vehemently than others, were also on the same page when it came to fighting for municipal issues in their respective constituencies. To be fair, during the cuts, Members raised many local, regional and international issues, with direct or indirect implications for Singapore, with sharp, incisive minds that have become a hallmark of our Parliament. We may be business-like, but in no way do we lack the cut and thrust of parliamentary debate. If only Members could learn to do away with long preambles and go straight to the point raised in their

questions and clarifications, they would not need to deliver their speeches at breakneck speeds.

10 My speech would not be complete without my acknowledging and thanking the following persons for their invaluable assistance and contributions to this debate:

(a) My two Deputy Speakers for standing in for me during the latter parts of the debates;

(b) Leader of the House and her Deputies for their guidance and assistance in running the business of the House;

(c) The Whip and his Deputies for ensuring the debates run smoothly and according to schedule;

(d) The Clerk of Parliament and her staff for their unstinting support in making sure that sittings run smoothly and efficiently; and

(e) The many civil servants from the various Ministries who would turn our meeting rooms into their temporary office to provide crucial administrative support to their Ministers. Their behind-the-scenes work may be unobtrusive but they must be duly recognised for the important role they play in this Debate.

11 Needless to say, my biggest vote of thanks must go to all our Honourable Members. It is your contributions and understanding that have made this debate outstanding in many respects, and my job as Speaker a gratifying and fruitful one,

although at times my Deputies and I had to intervene to remind you of your allotted time. Your cooperation and forbearance have helped to make it all possible.

Thank you all for a good debate.

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