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SPEECH BY TAN SOO KHOON, SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT

FOR THE SINGAPORE SINHALA ASSOCIATION DINNER & DANCE AT HILTON INTERNATIONAL, GRAND  
BALLROOM, 3RD FLOOR SATURDAY,

24 APRIL 1999, AT 7.30 PM

Mr Cyril Perera, President, Singapore Sinhala Association

His Excellency Mr Nimal Wijayaratne, High Commissioner for Sri Lanka

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening

My wife and I are very honoured to be invited to this evening's function and to join you in this special celebration of the Sinhalese New Year.

2 The Singapore Sinhala Association has done a fine job in promoting the economic, social and cultural development of the Sinhalese community in Singapore. Since its founding more than 70 years ago, the Association has been able to overcome several challenges and remains relevant to the community.

3 The efforts to keep alive the rich cultural heritage and the language of the Sinhalese people are an integral part of your Association's activities. These are commendable efforts as the preservation of language and culture is paramount for the well-being of a community. This is especially so for a minority group. In a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual society like Singapore, it is heritage like language and culture that anchor a people. Language and culture of a people embody values which the community hold dear.

4 Language and culture are two integral parts of a community. I believe that language and

culture allows you to know who you are, where you come from and where you are heading

towards. Also, when Singaporeans are aware of their heritage, they stand secure in their own

beliefs. And this gives them a sense of stability, a sense of belonging, two very important

elements for the well-being of the community. Language and culture give the community their

core identity and their roots. It is important that Singaporeans know their heritage so that, as a

community, they are able to build on the richness of their culture and develop further.

5 I am pleased to note that while your Association continues to vigorously promote and safeguard the economic, social and cultural interests of its members, it also has as another of its objectives the aim of co-operating with other communities for the nation's progress. It is as it should be - a recognition that we are all ultimately Singaporeans, with a shared sense of mission to achieve together what is best for the community at large.

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6 Singapore has thrived because of the contributions of people of all races. Our forefathers came here to seek a better life for themselves. It was tough but there were opportunities. They planted the seeds of the foundation for a modern Singapore. We must now ensure that Singapore remains a place where opportunities are plentiful, where our people pursue and grasp these opportunities with vigour and enthusiasm and most of all, where our people are determined to succeed.

7 The Sinhalese community has contributed much to the development of our nation. Many of them are professionals, doctors, lawyers, academics and businessmen. The community stresses the importance of education and continues to promote academic excellence amongst your young. Tonight's event also focuses on the educational performance of Sinhalese children, the presentation of book awards to outstanding Sinhalese students. This signals to the community the importance of education. Education, cannot be deemed trivial and deserves all the attention it warrants. It is right that the Association continues to emphasise on raising the educational achievements of its young people.

tsk19990424h

8 I understand that the Association hopes to improve its services to the Sinhalese community by leasing a new premise for a clubhouse, a place where members can meet regularly and call their own. This is a positive step towards improving the recreational facilities for members. I am sure you are all looking forward to having that clubhouse.

9 I wish the Association all the best in its search for a new place and in its future endeavours. And to all award recipients here this evening, my heartiest congratulations to you. I am sure you will continue to do yourselves, your family and your community proud.

Thank you

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