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SPEECH BY MR ZAINUL ABIDIN RASHEED, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR FOREIGN
AFFAIRS AND MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR CHENG SAN GRC AT THE 1999 UNITED KINGDOM –
SINGAPORE YOUTH EXCHANGE PROGRAMME FAREWELL DINNER ON TUESDAY, 15 JUNE 1999, 8.00 PM
AT THE BURKILL HALL, NATIONAL ORCHID GARDEN

Prof Leo Tan, Chairman,

NYAA Council

Mr Connal Rankin, Chief Executive Officer

HSBC Singapore

Mr James Soh, NYAA Executive Director

Leaders and participants,

British Youth Delegation

Distinguished guest, Ladies and gentlemen.

I am indeed most happy to be here this evening to join you in the 1999 United
Kingdom – Singapore Youth Exchange Programme Farewell Dinner.

But first allow me to reminisce a little about my old times as against your good time. How I wished I were younger, like you, like my children, to enjoy programmes such as the one you must be proud to be associated with today.

During my time, to get a chance to attend a scout jamboree, would have already been a tremendous privilege, a grand bonus. Even then, we wouldn't have dared dream of going to the UK. At most, probably, in one of the Malaysian states up north.

How lucky is today's youthful generation. What opportunities. But allow me to quickly add, what challenges too. You, more than anyone else, would realise what globalisation is all about today. What more for tomorrow. Thus the need to know what's going on in the world today. We have read much about the financial crisis in Asia and the world, growing competition, democratisation and Asian values, the ugly head of ethnicity and more. Nothing like coming face to face with such developments and challenges.

Programmes such as this will stand us in good stead. I believe it's no boy scout jamboree. It goes beyond the horizon of a simple get-together and in fact will reach out to form long lasting network of better understanding and friendship.

Allow me now to share with you a story about competition and perseverance or lack of. On some other occasion, it would also be seen as a joke but knowing how good the British are with their jokes, I would hesitate to call it one.

The message, however, cannot be more serious.

Once there was a guy who had wanted to sell a soft drink and was looking for a name for it. He asked a 'consultant' friend. He was advised to try '1 Up', to suggest that he should always be ahead of his competitors. He did. But it didn't work.

Improving on the quality of the product, he asked for another name. Try '2 Up'; one must persevere, he was told, after all it's his second chance. Still it didn't work.

Still trying, he asked for another name, thinking that his consultant wouldn't dare suggest '3 Up'. But his friend did. He obliged, but success was still elusive.

Fed up, he gave up. But not his 'consultant' friend. Convinced of his strategy, he went on and on trying, till he reached '7 Up'. As you all know, the rest is his story, a success story.

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Sorry, but that is not the real thing. You must be wondering by now why I had used that story for this occasion. I must confess, it was for a selfish reason. It was just to link with a slogan once used by the neighbourhood store chain the lucky 7 Eleven. I remember, there was a time when it used to carry the catchy slogan "Close But Never Closed".

Well, you would have guessed by now, this is the real thing for this programme. That is how I would describe the close relations between the United Kingdom and Singapore - close but not closed. It is all the more significant when the programme is organised in conjunction with this year's "Britain in Singapore" campaign.

The UK and Singapore enjoy strong bilateral ties. It is a rapport that permeates all facets of interaction between two countries - government to government, business with business and people to people. Indeed, this closeness should come as no surprise to us.

History has ensured that our two people have much that are in common and familiar. Yet, our respective societies have also evolved in a manner that makes us quite different and unique.

Singapore's system of government is based on the Westminster model - but we have adapted it to our socio-political needs. The Chinese, Indian and Malay cultures are not unfamiliar to the people of the United Kingdom - but the unique manner in which they exist and blend in Singapore will probably be. We both speak English - but, as you have probably realised by now, for some Singaporeans, the odd bit of Singlish is quite Ok-lah!

We must not take this historical relationship for granted. This year "Britain in Singapore" campaign's theme is "Shared Past - Shared Future", which is very appropriate indeed. That is why activities such as this youth exchange are important. They help to build closer ties between our youths by fostering a greater appreciation of what we have in common, and a better understanding and more importantly, acceptance of our differences.

It is a worthy project deservedly endorsed by our two governments, for it will certainly go a long way in promoting and strengthening the already good bilateral relationship between Singapore and the United Kingdom.

I commend the National Youth Achievement Award Council of Singapore and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award of the United Kingdom for working closely in nurturing and developing the youth of both countries, and for providing opportunities such as this exchange for our young people to develop global friendships and better understanding.

I would also like to thank HSBC for playing an active role in our national youth

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development work and their generous support of the 1999 United Kingdom – Singapore Youth Exchange Programme.

I understand that The Duke of Edinburgh's Award of United Kingdom will be hosting a return visit by the NYAA Youth Delegation to the United Kingdom next year. This is indeed encouraging and I look forward to more of such meaningful initiatives in the near future.

For the British Youth Delegation, I hope your stay in Singapore for the last few days has been enjoyable and in the process I sincerely hope that you have made many new and meaningful friends.

I wish you all well and a pleasant and safe journey home.

When you next think of Singapore, think of the Up and Coming UK-Singapore youth partnership for the future. That's the challenge. Think about it.

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