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SPEECH BY PRESIDENT S R NATHAN AT THE SCCCIS

MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL CELEBRATION ON TUE 21 SEP 99

AT 7.30 PM AT THE SCCCIS AUDITORIUM

Mr Tay Beng Chuan

President, SCCCIS

Your Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. I am deeply touched to be honoured tonight by the Singapore Chinese
Chamber of Commerce and Industry. More so, because of the way officials of SCCCIS

and the clan organisations showed their endorsement of me on Nomination Day. In fact, I was overwhelmed to see so many of you, taking time off from your important business commitments and standing in the hot sun, awaiting the outcome of my nomination that day. I thank you all for what you have done for me and for your pledge of fullest support.

2. Tonight, we celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival. What started as a Harvest Festival later became associated with the legends of "CHANG ER" – the beautiful lady in the moon. For us in Singapore, it has become a major festival particularly for Chinese Singaporeans – when family members seek to enjoy the full moon – an auspicious symbol of abundance, harmony and luck. Many other romantic legends are also associated with this Festival. Whatever be their significance, they are all outward acknowledgements that man's destiny is entwined with the universe.

3. In multi-racial, multi-cultural Singapore, we have a range of traditions, festivals, and rituals all round the year. For us these festivals and rituals go beyond the superficial. They are part of our rich heritage, and remain deep in our psyche and our value system. While scientific discoveries and space exploration have put paid to any notion of fairies on the moon, many still observe the festivals for the value they add to family togetherness and social bonding. They still flourish today because many among the older generation have persisted in seeking to preserve and sustain them as part of our tradition and heritage.

4. We need to ask ourselves how these festivals and traditions can be sustained in the future. To avoid our young becoming skeptical and critical, we need to make these festivals and their significance in value-terms intelligible to them. Otherwise, views that festivals and rituals are superstitious nonsense will acquire greater currency. With time they would end up in being done away with. Such a development will be a great loss for Singapore.

5. Traditions, customs and festivals are the ballast of our identity as a race, as a people and as a nation. It does not matter what their origins are or if the original beliefs upon which they are based cannot stand up to scientific scrutiny or empirical testing. Often old traditions, customs and festivals assume new meanings and new symbolism over time. We hope it will be so always.

6. Festivals, like the Moon-cake Festival, have become occasions to get together to renew familial ties and friendships. This alone is reason enough for us to continue celebrating them. We observe them today because they anchor us to our past as well as link our children to us.

7. To all Chinese Singaporeans, may I wish you a very joyous Mid-Autumn Festival. And to all guests tonight, as we share the mooncakes and enjoy the mid-autumn delicacies, let us make full use of this opportunity to deepen our friendships.

8. Thank you once again for inviting my wife and me to this celebration.
