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PARLIAMENT OF SINGAPORE

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SPEECH BY MR TAN SOO KHOON, SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT,

REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE, AT THE 5TH PUNJABI/SIKH HERITAGE DINNER ON 12 NOVEMBER 1999
AT THE RITZ CARLTON HOTEL, AT

8.00 PM

Sikhs all over the world this year have celebrated the 300th Anniversary of the Birth of the Khalsa. To commemorate this historic event your community in Singapore charted and successfully carried out a year-long programme of celebrations and festivities.

300 years may be considered, by some to be a short period compared to the history of other established religions. However, your community can be rightfully proud of a rich tradition handed down by your ancestors within this short period. In many ways, yours is a very universal tradition which emphasizes:

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- Working hard for an honest living;
- Sharing one's earning with others;
- Practising courtesy towards others;
- Engaging in volunteer service; and
- Remaining optimistic at all times.

Given the above universal values and the rich tradition you have inherited, it is easy to understand the valuable contribution that your community has made, over the decades, to Singapore. Though barely 15,000 in number, you have made significant contributions to the Republic in the civil service, judiciary, police and armed forces and education.

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Your community has also a notable contribution to the business sector. This was symbolized by Mr Kartar Singh Thakral being honoured as the Businessman of the Year in 1995. The crowning glory of your community's achievements in Singapore is that two Sikh MPs sit in Parliament today - no mean achievement for a small community like yours.

In addition to this, the last decade has seen your community galvanizing itself to achieve self-improvement in the context of national policies and goals. This is clearly evident from the numerous initiatives launched by your leaders at the community level.

In 1990 your community responded speedily and positively and set up the Singapore Sikh Education Foundation to take advantage of the new national policy allowing Sikh children to offer their mother tongue as a subject in schools. This self-help organisation, run by Sikh volunteer educationists, provides Punjabi language education to 1,850 Sikh children and prepares its own textbooks and curriculum on Punjabi and for value education in our national context. This is yet another example of your community's dynamism, pragmatism and creativity.

In 1995 your community moved into an area, which is of special concern to the entire nation. You set up the Sikh Welfare Council, which works with the Ministry of Community Development and SINDA to help the needy Sikh families with the objectives of strengthening the social fabric so that needs of both the young and old are adequately met.

I have also been heartened to learn that your leaders are in the process of evolving the "Singapore Sikh Community Vision 21". This vision I am told will be guided by the following principles:

- The development of a mechanism for community unity and optimisation of resources;
- There will be emphasis on nurturing your youth;
- Attempts at institutional specialisation in terms of different organisations undertaking specific roles e.g. religion, education, welfare, sports etc within the community;
- Continued efforts to enhance amongst fellow Singaporeans, the understanding of universal Sikh values with the objectives of contributing to the rich cultural diversity and harmony in the country; and
- Strengthening of self-help initiatives so that the Sikh community can continue to contribute to mainstream dynamism of our country.

Keeping the above principles in mind, I am confident that your community will successfully evolve the "Singapore Sikh Community Vision 21".

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Tonight's event which is the climax in your year-long celebrations signifies:

- The value your community places on education;
- The highly praiseworthy attempts by your community to motivate your young to excel;
- The importance that you accord to the members of the teaching profession in your community;
- The generosity of your philanthropists and the selfless dedication of volunteers who are prepared to invest their resources and priceless time in community upliftment projects; and
- The unity, sense of purpose and cohesion in your community.

I also wish to commend your entire community leadership, led by the two Sikh MPs, Mr Davinder Singh and Mr Inderjit Singh. The solidarity and unity of purpose with which you have carried out this varied and interesting year-long programmes, is impressive to say the least.

I am sure the young of your community will look back with a great deal of pride on the memorable and innovative programmes the community charted out for them to celebrate this 300th Anniversary of Khalsa in the course of 1999. At the same time it was a rich experience for all other Singaporeans who joined the celebrations.

Finally let me extend my heartiest congratulations to all the award recipients, as well as to the entire Sikh community on the auspicious occasion of the 5th Punjabi/Sikh Heritage Dinner. I extend my best wishes to your community in all its endeavors and I wish all of you an enjoyable evening.

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