SPEECH BY MR S DHAIRABALAH, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AT THE OPENING OF FIRST MEETING OF THE MALAYSIA-SINGAPORE INTER-GOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE IN KUALA LUMPUR ON 2 DECEMBER 1980 AT 2.00 PM

The inauguration today of the Malaysia-Singapore Inter-Governmental Committee marks an important step in the development of bilateral relations between our two countries. As the Prime Minister of Malaysia outlined when he was in Singapore last May, the aim of establishing this Committee is two-fold. Firstly, to ensure that issues or matters affecting the two countries are not allowed to foster in acrimonious negotiations but are taken up at the highest possible levels of Government, both official and political, and expeditiously resolved. Secondly, to help promote and foster closer cooperation between the two countries in all areas and thus further strengthen and consolidate the existing close ties. The fact that this Inter-Governmental Committee will be responsible to the respective Prime Ministers reflects the importance they attach to it. It underlines their commitment to improve the climate of relations between the two countries, by ensuring that minor problems do not in the process of bureaucratic wranglings become intractable ones, disregarding the larger interests at stake for both countries.

We have the fact of geography, history and close family ties on both sides for our foundation. But over the past 15 years our two countries have gone through different experiences and have faced different problems, and these have left their different imprints on both our peoples - different in attitudes, priorities and style. It is therefore natural that we have developed different approaches, outlook and even philosophy on statecraft.
Officials on both sides of the Causeway have naturally been affected by them.

The hope with which we inaugurate this Committee must be that officials on both sides of the Causeway will seriously re-examine and discard those attitudes and assumptions derived from the past and which are no longer relevant, and develop new attitudes and assumptions that will help our two countries achieve a balance of mutual benefit and move forward in closer cooperation.

Fortunately, however, over these years we have had leaders who know each other well, leaders who had developed close personal relationships arising from shared experiences in many things they did together dating back to their school days. But with the passage of time we will have to face the fact that there will be a gradual disappearance of that generation of political leaders and officials in both countries. Hence it becomes even more important that the process of maintaining and strengthening these bonds between our two countries must be continued. For only then will the emerging generation of leaders and officials be able to successfully continue cooperative endeavours and resolve differences. Only then would we be able to help build, strengthen and consolidate a better future for both our countries.

I take this opportunity to reiterate what we Singapore leaders have always stated about Singapore-Malaysia relations. It is our sincere belief that a prosperous, thriving and stable Malaysia is in Singapore's interest and that there is a continuing interdependence which is unlikely to change even with time. We may differ in our opinions. There may be differences in our policies. We may even take different paths. But the fact remains that our security, prosperity and well-being are intertwined and that it is in our mutual interest to resolve our differences, where they are critical to our well-being. It also behoves us always to strive to establish new avenues for closer cooperation.
It is in this context that the Inter-Governmental Committee offers a means of establishing better rapport between counterparts in Singapore and Malaysia and creates a forum not only to resolve problems but also to seize opportunities of enhancing Malaysia-Singapore cooperation in specific areas.

I do not think we should expect sudden or spectacular results. But I am hopeful that with mutual trust and confidence we can reach an equable and more fruitful relationship avoiding misunderstanding and clearing away doubts on both sides.

I look forward to the success of the Inter-Governmental Committee. It will be a factor for change and today marks an important point in the development of our bilateral relationship.