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SPEECH BY MR A RAHIM ISHAK, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE  
FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AT THE 1ST SOUTHERN REGION LEO  
CONVENTION 1978, AT THE EUSOFF COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF  
SINGAPORE, ON SATURDAY, 8TH APRIL 1978 AT 3.30 P.M.

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I am very glad to be among you all this afternoon for the opening of the first convention of the Leos of the Southern Region, comprising the Young Lions of Malacca, Kluang and Singapore. I would like to take this opportunity to extend a warm welcome to the 80 Leos from across the Johore Straits who have come for the occasion.

It is perhaps not an accident that our Lion City, as the tourist brochures describe Singapore, is hosting the first convention of this kind. The Lions and other service organisations have long grouped Singapore together with Peninsular Malaysia. That this common grouping has continued till today, 12 years after Singapore's separate independence, reflects the long tradition of family connections and friendly ties that bind the people of both countries. Indeed, those of you who follow the Malaysia Cup matches would note that Singapore occupies a geographically variable but psychologically central, position in the soccer family of the two countries. Even when I was a youngster the Malaya Cup matches which drew the most crowds were those involving Singapore.

Before both territories became independent and eventually separate sovereign nations, the people on both sides of the straits used to move across freely and naturally, for education, employment and even eligible life partners. The procedure for travel between the two countries has become more formalised today, but I am told that there is still a fair bit of traffic over the Causeway, both ways, by young people seeking opportunities and engagements, of one kind or another.

It is a matter of record that there are over 40,000 Malaysian workers in Singapore on work permits or employment passes. The number of Malaysian students in our post-secondary institutes of learning, either on ASEAN scholarships or on their own, is significant, though much less than it used to be. Many of those who work or study in Singapore eventually return to make their contribution to their homeland. But some stay on to settle in Singapore. Similarly, a fair number of Singaporeans cross the straits to work in Malaysia in various fields.

This interchange of our workers and students is not a bad thing. If nothing else, it continues the traditional links that have existed between the people of Malaysia and Singapore, despite the different directions that the respective governments might take in domestic policy and foreign affairs. The close nexus between Singapore and Malaysia has not been reduced in a fundamental way despite the dissolution of common structures in economic relations established during colonial times. The necessary decolonisation process has led to the termination of the common currency, splitting the stock exchange and reconstituting the common airline and other joint bodies for controlling exports of rubber, timber and pineapples.

Yet the abolition of these joint bodies has not resulted in the ending of the common or inter-connected interests of both countries in these matters. Malaysian rubber is still marketed through Singapore and there is cooperation or at least coordination in other fields. There is also competition, as is natural, with the inevitable duplication of facilities and services. But these have only spurred an expansion of activity in the economic fields concerned. After the phase of competition there inevitably arrives a point where cooperation becomes more meaningful, for both countries realise that they have a convergence of interests in many areas.

Both countries have a common interest in the expansion of world trade flowing from the economic recovery of the industrialised nations. Both are concerned about the threat of protectionism.

Malaysia is one of Singapore's top trading partners and vice versa: the two-way trade amounted to over \$6 billion (\$6,339,954,000) last year. Both countries have a stake in each other's prosperity.

Guided by this consideration, Singapore industrialists have invested substantially in Malaysia. In 1977, Singapore investments in pioneer industries in Malaysia accounted for \$183 million or 26.6% of total foreign investments. Malaysian businessmen are engaged in Singapore enterprises too. At mid-77, they accounted for \$98 million worth of investments in the Republic. Reflecting this mutual interest in the investment market of both countries is the active cross-trading that goes on in the two share exchanges.

This industrial and financial cross-fertilisation, so to speak, is underpinned by official-level co-ordination, for instance the widening of the Causeway and improvement of Customs stations to facilitate the increased flow of goods and people between the two countries.

You might have read in last Sunday's newspapers about the announcement by the Malaysian Deputy Minister for Works and Utilities that talks are to start on power inter-connection between our two countries. The trans-Straits link-up between the electric networks of NEB and PUB is designed to have a mutual back-up in situations of short supply for one or the other. It is proposed that initially two cables will link the Woodlands and Johore Bahru sub-stations. While at the outset this will benefit Malaysia, eventually Singapore will also be able to draw upon Malaysia's resources. This first step towards greater inter-dependence is an encouraging sign for further cooperation, bilaterally and in the context of ASEAN.

It is true that not all our interests coincide, which is only to be expected, given the different situations and conditions of the two countries. But we have found sufficient common ground in a variety of regional and international organisations and on various issues. Both Malaysia and Singapore are members of ASEAN, as well as the Commonwealth; we belong to the non-aligned movement

and the Group of 77 (the developing countries represented at the United Nations). Both adopt moderate positions on many international issues; both have sound administrations dedicated to development and the welfare of their peoples, guided by freely-elected political leaderships. There are differences of style and objectives, but the overall goals are similar - a better life for our people in a peaceful and secure region.

One important reason for the competition and cooperation that underlie our close and friendly relations is the common experience of the leaders of both countries, who went to the same schools or colleges or universities and took part in the anti-colonial struggle together. That generation is slowly but surely passing. The new generation may or may not have the same learning and other shared experience; some of the second-echelon leaders went to university in this Bukit Timah campus together, but have followed different paths of their country's respective development. Yet many retain their personal friendships and family links in the other country.

You, as the young and active members of the community on both sides of the Straits, have an equally important role to play in helping to maintain and expand these personal connections. I congratulate you for taking this step to demonstrate in a small but significant way the common aspirations and hopeful ideals of the young people in both Singapore and Malaysia. I wish your convention every success and a roaring get-together.

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