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**SPEECH BY BG (RES) GEORGE YONG-BOON YEO,
MINISTER OF STATE FOR FINANCE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
AT THE TAMIL MUSLIM JAMA'ATH'S SPECIAL SESSION
OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD BIRTHDAY'S CELEBRATION
AT SINGAPORE CONFERENCE HALL
ON SUNDAY, 23 OCTOBER 1988 AT 2.30 PM**

My wife and I attended a friend's wedding at Madurai in Tamil Nadu last year. He and I were classmates at Harvard in 1984. He is a Tamil from Madurai, left India many years ago to study in America, got his PR, brought his parents across and is now quite settled there. When it was time for him to get married, a match was arranged back in India, not a love marriage but an arranged marriage. The whole family went back. The ceremony, a Christian ceremony because they are South Indian Christians, but a very traditional one, nonetheless, with lots of flowers and coconuts and rock sugar and spices, was conducted in Tamil even though many of the relatives were more comfortable in English than in Tamil. They are an accomplished family. One of the uncles was the first Indian scientist to work in NASA, the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration. They may be American now but they take pride in their Dravidian origin, in the accomplishments of Tamil history and Tamil culture.

I am honoured to be your guest today. As Tamil Muslims, you are drawn from two great traditions. Like American Tamils, Singapore Tamils are justifiably proud of their heritage and tradition. As Muslims, you are part of an international Islamic community. You celebrate Prophet Muhammad's Birthday with fellow Muslims all over the world.

This pride in the past gives the individual the confidence to achieve. To succeed there must be self-confidence and self-respect. Morale must be high.

The rich heritage of our different communities is an important factor in Singapore's success. The more we wish to progress into the future the more must we understand our past. This is a common historical phenomenon of civilizations on the ascendant. Civilizations are like trees. A growing tree, to support its increasing weight, needs roots which go deeper into the ground.

We must, however, be careful that our pride in our origin does not lead to narrow-mindedness or bigotry or intolerance. The different communities in Singapore have different pasts but we all share a common future. We share a common destiny. We must therefore try to understand each other's hopes and fears, share each other's joys and sufferings.

You demonstrate this ideal by inviting me, a Chinese and a Catholic, as your guest of honour. Though I am neither Tamil nor Muslim, I am honoured to be able to share in your celebration of Prophet Muhammad's Birthday. I have no doubt that your Association will continue to play a leading role in keeping the Tamil Muslim community in the national mainstream.

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