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**SPEECH FOR MR THARMAN SHANMUGARATNAM, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER,
AT THE LAUNCH OF THE MALAY LANGUAGE MONTH (BULAN BAHASA)
2014, ON SATURDAY, 6 SEPTEMBER, AT THE ASIAN CIVILISATIONS
MUSEUM, RIVER ROOM**

Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Senior Minister of State for Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs,
and Chairman of the Malay Language Council

Mr Zaqy Mohamad, Chairman of the Bulan Bahasa 2014 Committee and MP for
Chua Chu Kang GRC

Yang Berhormat Pehin Orang Kaya Pekerma Laila Diraja Dato Seri Setia Awang
Haji Hazair bin Haji Abdullah, Minister for Culture, Youth and Sports, Brunei
Darussalam

Mr Ong Yew Huat, Chairman, National Heritage Board

Mrs Rosa Daniel, Chief Executive, National Heritage Board

Mrs Lee Suet Fen, Chairman, Asian Civilisations Museum

Parliamentary Colleagues

Distinguished Visitors from Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

[Speech will be delivered in Malay]

1. It is my pleasure to be here with you for the launch of Bulan Bahasa 2014. This is the 3rd year that the Bulan Bahasa has been organised yearly rather than biannually. This takes great effort. This year there's even a pilot to bring Bulan Bahasa to the heartlands in Jurong and Tampines. Let me congratulate Masagos and Zaqy, and the whole team who have put together the varied programme for Bulan Bahasa 2014.

2. The Bulan Bahasa showcases our Malay language, culture and heritage. It does so not just for the Malay community, but for all Singaporeans. Malay is our

national language, and Malay culture is part of our shared Singaporean heritage and identity.

3. The role of Malay in our national identity is enshrined in our National Anthem. Each word and phrase in our National Anthem was carefully chosen by Pak Zubir Said. They were written in simple Malay, and chosen so that everyone could sing the anthem with ease and understand the meaning of each phrase. Yet it uses the language to express in a simple and profound way the spirit of nationhood. It is a spirit of togetherness, and of aspiring for a better future as Singaporeans.

4. Our aspirations for the future will naturally change over time. They are very different today than they were in 1965, when a new nation was born and the majority of our people were poor and without any more than a primary education. As we progress, our aspirations will take new directions, and our people will have increasingly diverse aspirations as we see already among our young today. But the spirit surely remains the same. Together, we aspire for a better future.

5. Our schoolchildren sing our national anthem daily, and learn the meaning of the anthem starting from Primary One. But not a few Singaporeans admit that they do not understand some of the words they are singing. Some had learnt the meaning in school and later forgot it.

6. We can I am sure find ways to ensure that everyone understands the national anthem as we grow up, and can recall its meaning with ease many years after we

have left school. Everyone surely wants to sing the anthem with its full spirit and meaning. It is ours, and it is part of our identity.

7. Some of our schools put much effort into helping their students appreciate the meaning of the anthem. For example, in Telok Kurau Primary, teachers use various opportunities during the year to highlight the meaning of specific phrases in the anthem. For example, “Marilah kita bersatu” expresses the spirit behind our becoming an independent nation, and is part of our daily lives. The teachers do this so that the students can sing the anthem, with meaning, everyday. They also make the effort to correct any mispronunciation of the words when it is sung at the daily assembly. I am sure all our schools will take this seriously, and find their own ways to help children appreciate the meaning and symbolism contained in our national anthem. .

8. Many of our schools are also finding ways to help students pick up some simple, Conversational Malay through enrichment activities. They do so without testing students, and without stress. A good example is Edgefield Secondary School. All its students go through conversational mother tongue in year one. At the end of the program, non-Chinese students will set up a Chinese Wedding booth, non-Malay students will do likewise for a Malay Wedding booth, and they will express their understanding of these traditions in the respective conversational languages. Malay students also learn simple Chinese calligraphy and bring home their own writing of their Chinese names. Chinese students, likewise, learn aspects of the Malay culture. These are simple and fun ways students can learn about the culture of their peers, use the languages in a lively way.

9. Learning each other's mother tongues at a very simple conversational level is like wearing each other's traditional clothes, but goes beyond that. It develops a sense of fellowship, will help strengthen our multi-racial compact over time.

10. Mr Zubir Said was part of an era from the 1830s to the 1960s when Singapore was the intellectual, publishing and entertainment centre for the Malay world. Many others have contributed greatly to both our Malay culture and Singapore's culture. They include Iskandar Jalil, our foremost ceramist; Muhammad Ariff Ahmad, award-winning writer and editor and founding member of Asas '50; Abdul Ghani Abdul Hamid, award-winning writer, poet, artist and founding member of Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya (APAD) (Artists of Various Resources); as well as Marpiah binti Abdul Rahim, better known as Momo Latiff, whose performance at last year's Bulan Bahasa at the youthful age of 90 was I am sure enjoyed by many of you who are here today. They and others have added to Singapore's heritage, and contributed to our region in our own Singaporean way.

11. On this note, I am pleased to know that Associate Professor Dr Hadijah Rahmat is leading a team to document and critically examine the Malay literary development of Singapore since 1965. This is as part of the Malay community's contribution to our nation's SG50 celebrations. The process will involve crowd sourcing and electronically archiving the literary documents. A coffee table book capturing the spirit and contribution of Malay writings in Singapore will be produced. This will be accompanied by a roving exhibition about the contribution of our Malay writers in the heartlands. Such documentation is important as it allows us to record

significant writings that have captured our lives, thoughts and events from the past 50 years – in short, it is a historical record of our literary heritage. I am sure we will learn from this heritage, and that it will inspire much literary and artistic creation in future.

12. In another development, Singapore is now officially part of the Southeast Asian Literature Council (MASTERA) and will play host to the regional heads of the MASTERA Conference and the Southeast Asia Literature Seminar (SAKAT) for the first time next year. I encourage you to take this as an opportunity to showcase our literary capabilities to our regional counterparts.. We can also leverage on this new status as a MASTERA member nurture our pool of talented Singaporeans.

13. There are links between our heritage as a nation and that of our neighbours in the region. The artefacts specially picked by the curators of the Asian Civilisations Museum for the “Rakan-Rakan Muzium” tour are good examples of this. Do go for the tour later. I am sure you will find out interesting and surprising nuggets of information about our heritage. You’ll also be impressed by our students’ proficiency of the language and confidence in using it, something I hope will inspire us to improve our own standard of the language too.

14. Let us celebrate and uphold our multiracial and multicultural heritage. Let us continue to speak our own mother tongues with pride, make some effort to learn simple phrases in each other’s mother tongues, and ensure that our future generations take deep pride in being what we are: a multiracial and multicultural people.