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**SPEECH BY DR TONY TAN KENG YAM, CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL RESEARCH
FOUNDATION AT THE AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE'S
PRESIDENT'S DINNER HELD ON THURSDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2008**

Excellency

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to thank Nicholas Cocks, President of the Australian Chamber of Commerce for his gracious introduction.

I am greatly honoured to be awarded the President's Medal of the Australian Chamber of Commerce.

Australia, as many of you know, holds a special place in my heart.

Like many of you here tonight, I am a proud alumnus of an Australian university.

In 1965, I pursued my PhD studies in Applied Mathematics at the University of Adelaide, thus beginning a long and fruitful friendship with Australia.

Singapore's Strong Educational Links with Australia

Like me, many Singaporeans have chosen to pursue educational opportunities "down under".

Over 100,000 Singaporeans have studied in Australian universities over the years.

At present there are over 20,000 Singaporean students studying in Australia at various levels.

A significant number of senior members of the Singapore Government and civil service are graduates of Australian universities.

Our relationship in the field of education with Australia has also broadened, and is no longer confined to Singapore sending her best and brightest over to attend Australia's universities.

We have started to see substantive R&D collaborations and our tertiary institutions have signed Memoranda of Understanding with over 20 Australian universities.

For example, the recently established Solar Energy Research Institution of Singapore (SERIS), funded by the National Research Foundation (NRF), has strong ties with the University of New South Wales's (UNSW) renewable energy programme.

Singapore's Warm and Friendly Bilateral Ties with Australia

In my former capacity as a Cabinet Minister, I have had the pleasure of seeing how the constructive and friendly rapport Singapore leaders have with Australian leaders has grown over the years.

In August this year, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd visited Singapore to reaffirm the warm and friendly bilateral ties between Australia and Singapore, underpinned by similar strategic outlooks and many mutual interests.

The cooperation between Australian and Singapore is robust and substantial, spanning diverse areas.

Defence as a Pillar of Cooperation

One such area is in defence. During my tenure as Defence Minister, Singapore's armed forces developed a well-established working relationship with the Australian Defence Forces honed through many joint exercises and training courses.

The Singapore Armed Forces trains regularly in many facilities like the Shoalwater Bay Training Area and the Oakey Aviation Centre in Queensland, as well as RAAF Base Pearce in Western Australia.

We owe Australia a debt of gratitude for their generous support.

Beyond training grounds, both Singapore and Australia are members of the Five Power Defence Arrangement, and have been since 1971 and this year, the Singapore Armed Forces has deployed a medical team to support the Australian Defence Forces in Oruzgan province in Afghanistan.

Singapore – Australia Trade Relationship

Our economic ties are also significant. Bilateral trade between our two countries has flourished, particularly since the implementation of the Singapore – Australia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) in 2003.

Singapore is the second country to sign an FTA with Australia, after New Zealand.

SAFTA not only enhances the business opportunities in both countries but sends a strong signal to the world of Australia's long term commitment to Southeast Asia.

Last year, Singapore was Australia's 5th largest investor and top trading partner in ASEAN and we remain committed to promoting trade, investment and economic cooperation with Australia.

For instance, the Australian architecture and design firm Woodhead worked with a Singapore partner to give our newly opened Changi Airport Terminal 3 an elegant and classic look and I look forward to more of such collaborations in the future.

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to put on record Singapore's appreciation to the Australian Chamber of Commerce for the good work that the Chamber has done to foster stronger economic ties between our two countries.

Your regular networking activities help to strengthen the bonds of friendship and open up new opportunities for cooperation and collaboration between our business communities.

I wish you every success as we work together to develop many more opportunities of cooperation.
