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MORE THAN 1,600 PUPILS CHALLENGE THEMSELVES AT THE BIG SPELL 2015 FIRST ROUND

Singapore, 7 March, 2015 - A record turnout of 1,654 pupils tried their hand at spelling words such as "follicle", "abseil" and "extraterrestrial", at the preliminary round of the RHB-The Straits Times National Spelling Championship today.

The highly anticipated competition saw participants from some 118 primary schools nationwide attempt the pen-and-paper qualifying round, in which 50 pre-recorded words were read out to the pupils from Primary 4 to 6.

The fourth edition of The Big Spell is jointly organised by RHB Banking Group (RHB) and The Straits Times, in partnership with the Ministry of Education. It is supported by Institute of Technical Education College Central and the National Library Board; Sports Hub Library and Suntec Singapore are venue partners.

Pupils turned up as early as 7am at Suntec Singapore Convention and Exhibition Centre; many of them revising commonly misspelt words and holding onto thick dictionaries and sheaves of notes. In the room hung an air of anticipation, as the pupils challenged one another to spell tricky words.

Valerie Chong, 10, a Primary 4 pupil from Casuarina Primary School, said her technique was to study all night "and go to sleep hugging the dictionary".

"It doesn't matter if I get in or not, I'm just here to try for the experience," said Xavier Chua, 10, a Primary 4 pupil from Maris Stella High School (Primary), referring to the next zonal round.

Once the test was over, the scripts were collected and sealed in a box. The papers will be graded over the next few days and the spellers ranked according to the North, South, East and West zones in which their schools are located.

Weeks of preparation will pay off for about 80 of them, who will make it through this initial bout to enter the zonal round on March 28. The best spellers from this round will compete in the finals on April 25.

Just one pupil will eventually become Singapore's champion pupil speller. The champion will win \$5,000 and a trophy while his or her school will take the challenge trophy. The first runner-up wins \$3,000 while the second runner-up, \$1,000.

Ms Norazzah Sulaiman, Head of Group Governance & Corporate Services and Group Chief Governance Officer of RHB, said: "The preparations that the participants put themselves through is certainly impressive! I have been told of the extra hours of

spelling practice, the avid reading of books of all types of genres, and the search for tricky and difficult words online, in the quest to ready themselves for the Championship."

"We believe that education goes beyond the academic, and it is these attributes of hard work, resourcefulness and commitment that we at RHB Banking Group strive to instil through initiatives such as the NSC. I wish the students the very best as the competition begins."

Ms Serene Goh, editor of The Straits Times Schools programme, said: "This year's turnout is especially meaningful to all of us because we know how packed the school calendar is. It speaks to such a commitment to this competition -- among teachers, parents and pupils -- and everyone's desire to bring their best to the game. I feel like we've been added to the celebrations too."

In the lead-up to the spelling quest and to prime participating pupils, more than 100 teachers joined a workshop on 3 February at SPH News Centre, at which they picked up classroom strategies and ideas to make spelling more exciting. They also learnt tips on better pronunciation from principal master teacher and English Language Institute of Singapore programme director for pedagogy, Dr Ang-Tay May Yin.

Little Red Dot, The Straits Times' weekly school magazine for primary school pupils, will be covering the blow-by-blow excitement of the National Spelling Championship as it unfolds, and providing spelling tips and stories about the origins of various words.

The Straits Times' multimedia news portal SPH Razor will also showcase video clips of the preliminary round, the zonal rounds and the grand final, as well as a series of videos of spelling tips. Kiss92 FM will also air capsules featuring words of the week, on-air spelling competitions, among other things, while its deejays will also visit schools to promote good spelling.

To follow the NSC, go to www.straitstimes.com/bigspell

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About The Straits Times

The Straits Times is the English-language flagship daily of Singapore Press Holdings and the most-read newspaper in Singapore. It was launched on July 15, 1845, and provides comprehensive coverage of local, regional and international news. It has 20 bureaus in major cities worldwide, with its correspondents providing a Singapore perspective on what is happening around the world. Complementing the main title are weekly lifestyle supplements Digital Life, Urban and Mind Your Body, as well as IN and Little Red Dot for students.

The Straits Times is also on digital platforms with its website at www.straitstimes.com. It also has iOS and Android apps, and a menu of e-books housed in a separate Straits Times Star app.

The Straits Times has won multiple international awards, including from the Society of Publishers in Asia, the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, the Pacific Area Newspaper Publishers' Association (Panpa) and Society of News Design. It was named Singapore Newspaper of the Year 2014 and 2013 by Marketing magazine and voted Singapore's favourite newspaper 2013 by Superbrands.

Its website www.straitstimes.com won gold in "Best In Online Media" at the 2012 Wan-Ifra Asian Digital Media Awards. Its Communities microsites platform was named 2014 Digital Innovation of

the Year award by Panpa, and got Gold in the Best in Social Media category at the 2013 Wan-Ifra Asian Digital Media Awards.

About RHB Bank Singapore

RHB Bank was first established in 1961 as United Malayan Banking Corporation Berhad. Through a series of rapid expansion and strategic mergers, RHB Bank Singapore emerged as a full-licensed bank with a network of 7 branches and operating 13 Bureau de Change outlets in Singapore Changi Airport. The Bank provides a comprehensive range of financial products and services to consumer, corporate and business clients, ranging from various types of deposits and loans, treasury to investment banking.

RHB Bank Singapore is the first full bank to be conferred the prestigious S-Class (Service Class) award by SPRING Singapore as well as the first and only bank in Singapore and Malaysia to be awarded the prestigious “Best Customer Experience Management of the Year Award” in banking service by APCSC Hong Kong and most recently, awarded the SQC (Singapore Quality Class) by SPRING Singapore in June 2010.

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