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Kenang-Kenang Aidi Fitri

Hari Raya Celebrations at the Singapore Art Museum

Speech by Guest-of-Honour, Dr Yaacob Ibrahim

10.00 am, 7 February 1999 at Singapore Art Museum Glass Hall

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Good morning ladies and gentlemen. It gives me great pleasure to be here today to officiate the Singapore Art Museum's very first Hari Raya celebrations. Today, the Singapore Art Museum shares the joy of Aidi Fitri with both Muslims and non-Muslims through the various activities that have been planned for the day. The activities lined up will provide a glimpse into Malay culture. It is hoped that the non-Malay visitors to the museum today will be able to partake in these activities and as a result learn a little more about the significance of Hari Raya in Singapore as well as discover aspects of Malay cultural heritage.

Efforts such today's must be encouraged and welcomed. How often do we take the time to understand the cultural nuances and idiosyncrasies of our neighbours and friends? This need to understand differences and similarities among the communities in Singapore is important as it leads to greater tolerance and harmony. People however generally tolerate but do not understand. Having this celebration at a national

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institution provides an opportunity to create that understanding among the different communities. Hari Raya is not about pineapple tarts, ketupat and rendang. It is a religious festival to mark the end of fasting. And it is celebrated with a feast. And because the Malay community is a generous community and open our doors during Hari Raya to everyone, we usually enjoy the feast and forget the festival. I hope today's event can help to correct that imbalance.

Today's event is very significant as it attempts to showcase a very important Muslim festival at a national platform. Aidilfitri or Hari Raya celebration and all its associated meaning and activities, e.g. fasting during the month of Ramadhan and the morning Eid prayer on the first of Syawal, forms part of the identity of Malay Singaporeans. We are no different from Muslims all over the world in waiting eagerly for the coming of Ramadhan and Eid. However, unlike some other Muslims, we celebrate Eid by opening our doors to all Singaporeans. And unlike other Muslims, we celebrate throughout the month of Syawal. Hence, today's event, in the month of Syawal, is part of our celebration and the doors of the Singapore Art Museum are opened to everyone. Again while we feast our eyes on the food, let us not forget the religious significance of Hari Raya.

Celebrating a festive occasion at a museum may seem at oddity. The former is usually associated with fun, laughter and joy. The latter normally is associated with the past (and the dead!). But museums today, and especially those in Singapore see their role as also showcasing the present, such as the cultural and religious life of a community. This is because by observing the present, one is able to understand the past. And by observing the present, one understands the environment in which that community exists. I am sure our Chinese friends would not be too hard pressed to guess the origins of the practice of giving "green" hong baos during Hari Raya. Hence having this celebration here at the museum also serves to reinforce the multicultural nature of our society. Hari Raya is not celebrated only in Geylang. It is celebrated across Singapore, including the museum.

It is also heartening to see that the museum is working together with a group of youths in bringing us the day's festivities. Through such an event, the museum has provided these youths the platform on which they are able to showcase their talent and their passion for the preservation of Malay culture. Such opportunities are important because without them there will be no motivation for the young to engage in such activities.

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As we make our way into the new millennium, it becomes more imperative that we develop a culturally well-informed society. As the Singapore Art Museum moves into its third year, it also begins to explore ways of reaching out to a wider cross-section of the Singaporean community. Art is for all to enjoy and must therefore be opened up to all levels of society. However, many may still perceive art museums as intimidating institutions and as domains of the educated and cultured few.

Our first task is to dispel such perceptions by making art and the art museum more accessible to those who may not have a predisposition towards art. The Museum recognises this fact and is embarking on several initiatives to open its doors to various communities. By tailoring activities to suit specific groups, it hopes to appeal to a wide-ranging audience and as such, the museum will be able to share the pleasure of art with people from all walks of life.

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I therefore congratulate the Singapore Art Museum for their foresight in today's event.

(speaker to switch to Malay)

Salam sejahtera saudara dan saudari. Saya ucapkan Selamat Hari Raya buat semua yang hadir.

Kita akan melangkah masuk ke dalam satu millennium yang baru. Dalam usaha kita membi na sebuah masyarakat dengan jangkauan visi yang luas, kita juga perlu memperkayakan masyarakat kita dengan ilmu budaya termasuk seni. Walaupun sebuah institusi yang masih muda, Muzium Seni Singapura memainkan peranan penting dalam mempertingkatkan kesedaran dan kefahaman tentang seni di kalangan semua golongan. Masyarakat Melayu dengan warisan seninya yang tersendiri bukan sahaja berkemampuan dalam membi na kepekaan terhadap seni moden dan kontemporari, tetapi juga dapat menyumbang dal am perkembangan seni.

Sambutan Hari Raya ini adalah satu contoh di mana Muzium dapat mendekatkan diri nya pada masyarakat. Secara am, ia meningkatkan pendedahan dan kefahaman kepada hal-hal seni dan budaya. Ia juga meningkatkan keyakinan kita dal am peranan yang dapat kita mainkan sebagai masyarakat Melayu. Mel alui perjumpaan begini, kita dapat membi na kesedaran tentang penglibatan kita dal am perkembangan seni kontemporari Singapura. Angkatan Pel uki s Aneka Daya (APAD) mi sal nya, sejak awal enam-pul uhan cukup akti f dal am menggal akkan perkembangan seni di kalangan masyarakat Melayu. Pel uki s-pel uki s seperti Abdul Ghani Hamid dan S. Mohdir adalah antara pelopor yang penting. Kita juga dapat menghargai keterlibatan yang lain seperti Jaafar Latiff, Iskandar Jalil dan Sarkasi Said. Dan kini, segolongan seniman yang baru jelas memberi kontribut ion yang berharga. Sebagai satu di antara seniman kontemporari yang penting, karya-karya Salleh Japar dapat anda nikmati hari ini dal am pameran yang bertajuk Trimurti dan Sepuluh Tahun Seterusnya. Ini semua memberi gambaran akan pentingnya peranan masyarakat Melayu dal am memperkayakan identiti budaya di Singapura. Seni dan masyarakat tidak dapat dipisahkan. Keadaan seni yang subur menandakan pemikiran masyarakat yang bukan sahaja kreatif, tetapi juga mantap bagi menghadapi cabaran yang akan datang.

Teri makasi h.

TRANSLATION - ANNEXE A

Greetings Ladies and gentleman. I would like to wish you Selamat Hari Raya

We will be entering into a new millennium. In our efforts to create a society with a broad vision, we will also need to develop it to be culturally well-informed.

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Although it is a young institution, the Singapore Art Museum plays an important role in increasing awareness and appreciation for the arts among all communities. With a unique cultural heritage of its own, the Malay community is not only equipped in appreciating modern and contemporary art, but also plays a continual role in the development of arts.

This Hari Raya celebrations is an example of the Museum's efforts in getting close to the community. It attempts to increase the awareness and appreciation for the arts. It also increases our confidence on the role that the Malays may play in the arts. Through gatherings as this, we may increase our understanding on the level of involvement the Malay community in the development of contemporary art in Singapore. Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya (APAD) for example, had played an important role in encouraging art activities among the Malays. Artists like Abdul Ghani Hamid and S. Mohdir are among their important pioneers. We also value the contributions of others like Jaafar Latiff, Iskandar Jalil and Sarkasi Said. A new generation of artists are now making their mark. Among them is Salleh Japar, whose works may be seen today in an exhibition Trimurti and Ten Years After. All this tells us about the important role the Malays are playing in enriching the cultural identity of Singapore. Art and society cannot be separated. A healthy artistic scene marks a society that is not only creative, but also matured in facing future challenges.

Thank you.

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