

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENCE,
MR. WEE TOON BOON, AT THE WESAK DAY CELEBRATIONS AT
THE VICTORIA MEMORIAL HALL AT 9 P.M. ON FRIDAY, 3/6/66.

Today is Wesak Day, the day on which Buddhists celebrate the two thousand five hundred and tenth anniversary of the birth of Lord Buddha. Though Wesak Day is celebrated every year, where the Buddhists of Singapore are concerned, there is a difference between this celebration today and those of past years. Today's celebration is of special significance for two reasons. firstly, this is the first Wesak Day celebration since the birth of the Republic of Singapore; secondly, this is also the first time that the Buddhists of all races in Singapore have come together in a joint celebration. Such an important and meaningful occasion has never been witnessed before in Singapore.

As everyone knows, Singapore is a country where different races live side by side with each other, where many religions are freely practised, and where a diversity of cultures meet. In such a society, if we want stability, development and progress, we must all live in peace and harmony together, and together work for the welfare of the country. To attain these aims there must be tolerance between the various races and mutual respect for each other's religion; and we must work concertedly towards the goal of gradually blending all the various cultures into one which is our proudly our own.

Buddhism is a religion based on kindness and universal love. Buddhist philosophy is extremely profound. However, unless I am mistaken, the widespread influence of Buddhism has been mainly due to the exemplary behaviour set by the believers of the faith. As far as I know, a Buddhist must, throughout his life, practise the three principles:- Moderation, Tolerance and Kindness. These are three virtues which should guide human behaviour and human affairs. And in a multi-racial environment like ours in Singapore, where people professing different religions and of different cultures are found side by side, these three virtues are worth cultivating. This is especially so in a new country where harmony among the races, peace and tranquility in society, as well as progress in affairs of the State depends so much on the practice of these three virtues.

Perhaps there may be some who feel that moderation, tolerance and kindness are negative approaches to human affairs, and as such cannot offer anything constructive. But this view might have been true only of an old system or feudal society. In a progressive country like Singapore where democracy is practised, especially in a world where there is continual political strife, these three virtues can be applied usefully in a new context with constructive results.

For instance, moderation and tolerance need not be taken to mean that one has to give way in everything. On the other hand, these virtues may be translated to mean respect for each other's points of view.

In Singapore today, if there should be no mutual respect among the various races, religions and cultural movements, how could we hope to arrive at any Ideal, acceptable to all? How could the various language streams of education be ensured fair and just treatment? How could development of the country proceed smoothly in accordance with our plans? Moreover, in a place like Singapore where diverse cultures meet - if we lack tolerance and understanding of other people's points of view; if each section of the populace insulates itself and refuses to absorb what is desirable from other sections; or refuses to divest itself of inherent shortcomings - how could anyone hope to create a distinctive culture of our own in the next ten or even a hundred years?

Fortunately, Buddhists are tolerant and have kindness in their hearts, and are able not only to sympathize with the sufferings of others but through service help them overcome them wherever possible. That is why we can see around us in Singapore today, much evidence of the many constructive contributions which Buddhists have made to society. They have worked hard to achieve results in the field of education, in medical services for the people, and in charity work for the destitute. Indeed, their efforts for the people of Singapore have been generous and laudable. Compared with other countries in the region, Singapore can be said to have attained quite a high standard of living. As far as social services are concerned, the Singapore Government has gone beyond what most other countries in the region have not.

However, we must not be complacent with our present achievements. A lot more remains to be done to give the public even better services, and this is where the Buddhists, and others can contribute by way of co-operating with the government in the development of a really flourishing Singapore. I sincerely hope that all of you will, in the same spirit with which you served the public before, continue to answer this call for Service to meet the challenging needs of the country. I hope that, with love in your hearts, and dedicated service towards the welfare of the people of Singapore you will continue to contribute to the welfare of all, and help build our country, though small in area, into a shining example of a welfare State in the midst of a turbulent world.

In the politically unstable world of today, there are some countries which still do not enjoy peace, and whose people continue to undergo indescribable hardships. If the leaders of the various organisations in our Republic will continue wisely as you have done, to put the well being of the community before self, then Singapore will not only avoid much suffering in the future, but will become day by day a more just and better country to live in.

In conclusion may I take this opportunity of wishing the Buddhists of Singapore, and of the whole world, a Happy Wesak Day.