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25 FEB 1978

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SPEECH BY MR A RAHIM ISHAK, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE,
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING
OF PROPHET MOHAMED'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS AT THE
CONFERENCE HALL SHENTON WAY ON 20 FEB 78 AT 8.00 PM

Greetings, and peace be upon you.

I take this opportunity to convey to you my warmest regards in conjunction with Prophet Mohamed Birthday celebrations. I hope these celebrations will bring about beneficial results in mental, spiritual and religious upliftment in the context of our present-day individual and social development.

There is no doubt that mental, spiritual and religious upliftment in the context of development has a very big significance, because to a large extent the success or failure of development efforts in all fields can be said to depend on the mentality and morality of society. Although we cannot deny the fact that development in all the vital sectors of our national life, particularly in the economic and relevant fields, is important, since ours is a developing nation, we also cannot deny the importance of unity. Prophet Mohamed himself had set a good example. When he developed his nation at Medina, he had made efforts to unite people of various tribes and races there at that time - at first between the Aus and Hazrat tribes, and then between the Muslims and the Jews who had all entered into an agreement to jointly develop and defend the nation. Then he made it compulsory for Muslims to pay the zakat (tithe) and the non-Muslims to pay the ufti (excise and duty) in order to build up the state coffers. He then convinced the people of the importance of labour and work, no matter how small or lowly they might be.

Nonetheless, the Muslims should have greater responsibility towards national development efforts. This is because apart from the call of duty to the nation, we also have responsibilities towards Allah the Almighty and to respond to the teachings of our Prophet. The Islamic teachings brought by Prophet Mohamed (peace be upon him) have always taught us to be

at peace with ourselves and to have a feeling of give and take with other races and religions, to be comfortable in life, to respect world progress apart from not forgetting the life in the world hereafter. Islam teaches: "Be of service unto this world as if you are going to live forever and at the same time be of service for the world hereafter as if you are going to die tomorrow". We are also taught about the useful values of life, to do good deeds to others and to stay away from all evils. All this will ensure our security as well as the security of others.

What is now enveloping the social life of some of our younger generations is the drug problem, a deviation from the true teachings of Islam. To those who have been hooked on drugs, their involvement in this social disease really saddens us all. In fact, whatever the consequences of urbanization and emotional tensions faced by them, there are always solutions to be found particularly through other useful activities. For instance, participating in the training of self-discipline in the national service, sports and athletics or at least to involve themselves in educational activities, either secularly or spiritually.

People who have religious faiths believe that drug abusers can be rehabilitated through religious education. I hope parents concerned would be able to act on this immediately in order to save a member of their family from falling into the dangerous cauldron of drug abuse by responding to the religious calls.

In this respect people with religious beliefs should show in their daily lives that they are good citizens and are glad to render services in all fields according to their capabilities. In this way they will set a good example through their deeds and action to the society at large.

This is a heavy task but if we do it with discipline, God willing, the task will seem lighter. If the faithful fulfil their obligations well, they will certainly gain the respect of people from other communities. This is the reason why every Muslim should work hard, as enjoined by Islam, and pray that God Almighty will show us the right path.

I wish to stress that the Muslims have no alternative but to follow the teachings of Prophet Mohamed (peace be upon him) as well as his teachings on universal brotherhood of mankind regardless of race. In Islam we derive great benefits in practising religion, as Islam does not believe in racial discrimination.

In Islamic teachings, everything that is done should have a definite purpose. Tonight we celebrate the birthday of our beloved Prophet Mohamed (peace be upon him). What is the significance of this celebration to us Muslims? Prophet Mohamed himself did not request that we celebrate his birthday. We Muslims find it necessary to celebrate his birthday as we feel that by doing so it strengthens our determination in our struggle for the Islamic cause.

Islam is not a belief that is confined to spiritual practices and the holding of religious functions. It is a religion which encompasses all aspects of living.

From the teachings of the Koran and Traditions of the Prophet we will find guidance in our relations with Muslims and non-Muslims. All Islamic teachings guide us to live in harmony not only among fellow Muslims but with the non-Muslims as well.

Our religious duties, such as the daily prayers, fasting, payment of tithe and pilgrimage are meant for the Muslims. Islam also teaches its followers to do good to others and to live in harmony with people of all races. I wish to propose tonight that we pay greater attention to Islamic teachings that are universal in application. However, in doing this we are not trying to reduce the importance of Islamic teachings meant for the Muslims.

Islam requires that a Muslim who passes away be buried in a place where other Muslims who have died are buried. In prayer, we are asked to pray together with our Muslim brothers. These are a few examples of obligations expected of Muslims.

But not all Islamic teachings are of such nature. Islam also teaches us to befriend people who are good irrespective of their beliefs. If we are in need of help, we are advised to seek help from anybody and not from Muslims only. The religion forbids its followers to take the life of a fellow human being even though he is not a Muslim. Killing, swindling, stealing, damaging other people's properties, rape and other criminal acts are prohibited in Islam and Islam does not condone these acts on non-Muslims.

So is the case with Islamic teachings pertaining to doing good towards our fellow-men which are not restricted to Muslims only. Anybody who requires and deserves help should be given help. Islam teaches us to

be good neighbours irrespective of religion. In other words, Islam teaches us to practise universal brotherhood for the well-being of mankind.

For the well-being of mankind, there are many other aspects of Islamic teachings which should be disseminated among non-Muslims. These teachings will help efforts to achieve progress in this modern era. Let me cite here a few examples.

The government and the people of Singapore are making earnest efforts to beautify Singapore by planting trees. The place where the people of this world want to go to in the hereafter, paradise, is known as "Jannah" in the Koran and this word means "a beautiful garden". Paradise is described in the Koran as a garden with rivers of crystal-clear water flowing, beautiful trees growing and pleasant surroundings.

At present efforts are being made to preserve the ecology. Such efforts are indeed important. We Muslims are prohibited from damaging trees or cutting them down indiscriminately.

So is the case with the Prophet's teachings. He once said that cleanliness was part of religious faith. How important this teaching is in our present context. Efforts to maintain personal cleanliness and cleanliness in the home or in the nation have been given religious significance by Islam.

Social justice, providing opportunities for children to receive education, providing proper health and medical services and recreational amenities, efforts in cutting down unemployment, service to the people are efforts meant to provide welfare to the people which are called upon by Islam. Islam wishes us to live in happiness, free of disturbance to enable us to perform our prayers.

There are many aspects of Islamic teachings we have to spread as wide as possible. A good example is the celebration of the Prophet's birthday. By holding it we increase our religious awareness.

It is my hope that we can expose our religion more widely so that other people will get a better understanding of Islam.

In the national interest we must see to it that wrong religious teachings are checked.

With this noble aim, we believe that the Singapore Muslim Religious Council through various activities with its organised manpower will be able to achieve this objective. I was told that in the context of celebrating

this year's Prophet Mohamed's birthday, there are 13 District Committees which have been able to co-ordinate the celebration. This is another move made by MUIS to prevent our society from wasting their money and time besides conserving energy by co-ordinating the celebrations to be held at one place and at the same time in every district.

I hope on such occasions as this the teachings of Prophet Mohamed can be further stressed as they can help us to overcome or solve our personal problems and problems pertaining to national development and the ills of society which will end in the weakening of its members in the practice of religion and the upholding of religious values. Stressing the Prophet's teachings will also reinforce our belief and strengthen our faith in religion.

When these objectives are achieved it will be easy for us to adapt ourselves to every development and change that is taking place around us. The result will be that the Prophet Birthday celebrations that are held from year to year will leave a more profound impact and be more beneficial in our daily lives.

And now, I have great pleasure to declare open the Prophet Mohamed Birthday celebrations for the year 1398.
