

SPEECH BY MR TAN SOO KHOON
THE SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT
FOR THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS OF
THE PLANTING OF THE SACRED BO-SAPLING
AT THE SRI LANKARAMAYA (THERAVADA BUDDHIST TEMPLE)
SUNDAY, 28 FEB 99 AT 6.30 PM

Venerable Sirs

Mr Manukularatne, President of the Singapore Sinhala Buddhist
Association

Members of the Sinhala Buddhist Association Management
Committee

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening

I am happy to join you this evening on this special occasion. The Singapore Sinhala Buddhist Association has served the Sinhalese community for some 70 years. Likewise the Theravada Buddhist Temple has played a significant role in the lives of Singaporean Sinhalese for as long a time. It is indeed an honour to be here to participate in this sacred moment and to unveil the "Ranveta" Golden Fence surrounding the sacred Bodhi Tree Shrine.

2 There is a great history to this sacred Bodhi Tree. I am sure that many of you here tonight know the story of this Bodhi Tree, but on this auspicious occasion it is worth recalling the story.

3 The late Reverend Narada Maha Thero from Colombo, Sri Lanka, visited the temple regularly when it was formerly located at Outram Road. He and members of the Ceylon Pioneer Corps were key figures in the early development of the temple. They contributed immensely to the large number of religious activities at the temple. As from 1934 onwards, the late Reverend Narada Maha Thero and members of the Ceylon Pioneer Corps brought with them two Bo-saplings from the sacred Sri Maha Bodhi Tree

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at Anuradha Pura in Sri Lanka, the tree under which Buddha attained Enlightenment. And today, half a century later, we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of that historic moment.

4 In marking this auspicious occasion, we should also take the opportunity to remind ourselves of some of the values that the Buddhist religion imbues in its devotees and followers. Values such as righteousness, integrity, diligence, kindness and generosity towards others, filial piety and respect for elders are deep-rooted ones, and together with the sacrifices, hard work, courage and endurance of generations of Sinhalese Buddhists in Singapore, have been the basic building block on which your community has built its successes in Singapore.

5 These are values which are universal to all and apply to people of other races and religions. Together with the key principles that have been accepted by all Singaporeans – the principles of multi-racialism, meritocracy and equal opportunities for all, regardless of race, language or religion – they have allowed us to build a strong and cohesive nation. Because Singaporeans come from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, we have continually emphasized the need for racial and religious harmony and strived for social cohesion. We have worked hard in getting our different peoples to live together harmoniously to build a stronger Singapore. We have thus turned our diversity in race, language and culture to our advantage, and must continue to ensure this for future generations of Singaporeans.

6 Just two weeks ago, a foreigner wrote in the Sunday Times (14 Feb) that he was very pleased to see people of different races and cultures, namely the Chinese and Indians, celebrating the Thai Pusam. He was thrilled to see such racial harmony in Singapore. Likewise, I see Sinhalese and Chinese devotees here tonight. This definitely reinforces the point made by our foreign friend, that "cultural diversity is not a threat, but a unifying force for a nation".

7 To further support this notion that cultural diversity is a unifying force, we will also have a Chinese recipient for the Award for Service Rendered. The three recipients are outstanding members of the Association, and they have been dedicated helpers of the temple and the community. I congratulate the award recipients.

8 On behalf of the Theravada Buddhist Temple, I salute you for your dedication to the temple. You are fine examples to your community and may you inspire others to contribute as you have.

9 I thank the temple's management for inviting me to this joyous occasion, and I wish the Theravada Buddhist Temple and all devotees, all the best for your future endeavours.

Thank you

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