

Singapore Government

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**SPEECH BY MR TAN SOO KHOON, SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT
AT THE DEEPAVALI LIGHT UP 2000 SWITCH ON CEREMONY
ON SATURDAY, 7 OCTOBER 2000 AT 7.00 PM AT
CAMPBELL LANE**

I am honoured to be invited to join you at this evening's function to celebrate Deepavali.

2 Deepavali is the most significant festival celebrated by Hindus all over the world. According to Hindu mythology, it marks the victory of divine forces over evil, and of light over darkness. It is also a time when families and friends get together to strengthen their ties and to extend compassion, generosity and charity to others.

3 In Singapore, Deepavali is celebrated not only by the Indian community but by all Singaporeans. At this time the colourful and diverse lifestyles as well as the rich cultural heritage of the Indian community are on display for all to see. It allows Singaporeans the opportunity to learn about and understand another facet of life in multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural Singapore. Such understanding adds to better inter-ethnic ties and harmonious living amongst our different races and strengthen community bonds.

4 As a multi-racial and multi-religious nation, we continually remind ourselves of the need to maintain our racial and religious harmony. In many countries, religious belief is inherent in a particular racial identity. Very often conflicts between different races take on a religious flavour leading to fighting, bloodshed and the loss of precious lives. Too often do we read in the newspapers and see on television of how easily passions can be aroused and violence incited in other countries, resulting in the lives of peoples being torn apart because of ethnic and religious strife.

5 In Singapore we are fortunate to have enjoyed racial and religious harmony for many years, but it is something we cannot take for granted. In a small country like ours, where people belong to different religions, even the slightest insensitive, hostile or provocative utterance or act, made either thoughtlessly or deliberately, can be potentially explosive and endanger our religious harmony. That is why we have the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act that ensures no one is allowed to embark on mischievous or irresponsible conduct that can threaten religious harmony. One of the most significant contributing factors to racial harmony in Singapore has been our policy of meritocracy that allows for equal opportunities for each and every one to do well in life, regardless of one's race,

language or religion. There is no discrimination against anyone because of his or her racial or religious background. Each person makes it in life on the basis of his or her own merits. Preserving our racial and religious harmony in Singapore is therefore not just a high-sounding ideal. It is vital to stability and order in Singapore, and has been the bedrock on which we have build our nation and allowed our people to enjoy peace and prosperity.

6 The organisers of Deepavali Light Up 2000 are to be congratulated for sharing the joys of Deepavali with all Singaporeans. The Hindu Endowment Board, together with the Little India Shopkeepers and Heritage Association, the Singapore Tourism Board and the National Heritage Board have combined their efforts with several corporate sponsors to take Singaporeans through the Festival of Light and the various aspects of Indian culture. I hope that Singaporeans, young and old, of all races, will take this opportunity to familiarise themselves with the rich heritage of the Indian community and enjoy the festivities of Deepavali.

7 I wish one and all a happy Deepavali and hope that you have an enjoyable evening.

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