

04-1/82/12/10.

SPEECH BY MR S DEANABALAN, MINISTER FOR CULTURE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AT THE LAUNCHING OF SINGAPORE FESTIVAL OF ARTS AT THE ISTANA ON 10 DECEMBER '82 AT 6.00 PM.

It gives me great pleasure to be here this evening to launch the Fourth Singapore Festival of Arts. I would like to bid a very warm welcome to all our overseas artistes who have come from as far away as the United States, Europe, Nigeria, India, Japan and the People's Republic of China, as well as Hong Kong, Indonesia and Australia, to join us in our celebration of the Arts. We are delighted with your participation.

This Arts Festival is organised every two years. It is the high point of efforts throughout the year to expose Singapore artistes and audiences to artistic talent from all over the world and to provide a special platform for local artistes and art enthusiasts to show their works. All the events in our cultural calendar are aimed at widening the horizons of Singaporeans by exposing them to the best in the fields of art both local and foreign. The Festival of Arts is meant to achieve the same objective in a concentrated effort over a short period of time. By its very nature it arouses more enthusiasm, interest and participation on the part of the people whether as audience, performers or helpers in the background. A special effort has been made to invite foreign artistes to participate. Some may already have a following here. Others will be new to Singapore with new art forms which will make Singaporeans aware of some of the things that are going on in the world of art. Local artistes who normally work within their own groups, will join hands with other groups to attempt works

which they would not normally undertake. Further, local artistes and enthusiasts will have an opportunity to work with those from abroad who come here with established reputation and achievements.

So this festival should be taken as a celebration. It is a celebration for Singaporeans - those who enjoy just listening or watching as well as those who enjoy as performers or producers or in backstage and off stage supportive roles that are part of any artistic event. I hope the foreign artistes who have come here to perform and work with our home grown talent will also enter this spirit of celebration.

But, of course, there is also a serious side to activities in our cultural calendar, including the Arts Festival. We often talk of improving the quality of life in Singapore as distinct from improving the standard of living. We have concentrated, and rightly so, on improving the standard of living of Singaporeans. It has, however, become fashionable among some to decry the Singaporean's pursuit of material interests and the Government's emphasis on enhancing the country's economic well being. I have said it before, and I'll say it again, that we don't need to feel apologetic about this. This festival, for example, would not have been possible if the businesses who have contributed did not do well in their business. Without better standards of living - more jobs, more housing, more education, better health - one cannot hope to improve the quality of life.

But this does not mean that we can postpone thinking about the quality of life until such time as we have acquired all the wealth we feel we need to assure our future. Even as we put our main effort into improving the standards of living, we ought to at least ask ourselves what our population's higher aspirations should be. The question was well framed by an English educationist, Matthew Arnold, more than 100 years' ago.

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He asked about those who thought their sole purpose in life was to get rich, whom he called Philistines, this question: "Consider these people, then, their way of life, their habits, their manners, the very tones of their voice: Look at them attentively, observe the literature they read, the things which give them pleasure, the words which come forth out of their mouths, the thoughts which make the furniture of their minds; would any amount of wealth be worth having with the condition that one was to become just like these people by having it?" I am sure he didn't mean that it is better to be poverty stricken but cultured than to be a Philistine. But the question is a valid one that the increasing number of Singaporeans who are in the middle and high income groups ought to ask. Those of us who are interested in promoting the arts in Singapore hope that the various cultural activities will help each raw person to "Draw ever nearer to a sense of what is indeed graceful and becoming and to get the raw person to like that".

My remarks will not be complete without an expression of thanks to those who have made this festival possible. This year, for the first time, the pioneer sponsor of the Festival - Mobil Oil Singapore - has been joined by a co-sponsor, the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board. There have been numerous major contributors and a host of contributing supporters. With a bigger budget, the organisers are able to give you the best Arts Festival to date. A lot of people have worked very hard to make the festival a success. The media too have played an important role. I would like to thank all these people for their support.

As we launch the 1982 Festival, and the theatres open their doors, I wish each and everyone of you - performing artistes and the audience - a most enjoyable time.