

- 1 APR 1997

PRESS RELEASE

Release No.: 06/JAN

09-1/97/01/10

97-JS-1

**SPEECH BY PROF S JAYAKUMAR,
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND MINISTER FOR LAW,
AT THE SINGAPORE KHALSA ASSOCIATION,
NO. 2, TESSENSOHN ROAD
ON FRIDAY, 10 JANUARY 1997 AT 8.00 PM**

On 25 August 1996 DPM (Deputy Prime Minister) Lee Hsien Loong addressed the Sikh community and spoke about two key principles in our society, meritocracy and multi-racialism. He pointed out that multi-racialism was a key principle of our society and that the PAP (People's Action Party) Government has always stood for the interests of all ethnic groups, and not just the majority Chinese community. He added:

"Many Singaporeans who have grown up since independence take our system of meritocracy and multi-racialism for granted. They have not experienced, and cannot imagine, how disastrously different Singapore can be if we abandon these principles. They do not know that this issue was so vital that Singapore's leaders and people of the independence generation fought for it even at the risk of their lives, and that ultimately this issue precipitated the birth of our nation."

DPM Lee's comment, in a sense, was prophetic because little did we know that in a few months later in December this principle of multi-racial harmony would be at stake in the General Election.

In the recent General Election, 83 MPs (Members of Parliament) were returned to Parliament. This included 19 MPs from minority communities. One of the smallest minority communities, the Sikhs, have now two MPs in Parliament. It is a testimony to the Sikh community that they continue to produce citizens of distinction for important positions. But it is also a testimony to the system of our multi-racial policy and the policy of the PAP to field a multi-racial slate of candidates.

The recent General Election was a watershed election in many ways. However, for minority communities in Singapore, there are three very significant features of the Election:

Firstly, because of Mr Tang Liang Hong and what he stood for, Prime Minister (PM) Goh Chok Tong decided to make the continued support for the tenet of a multi-racial and harmonious society an important issue in the Election.

Secondly, the Election results showed that Singaporeans supported the PM in rejecting chauvinism and extremism, in favour of multi-racial harmony.

Thirdly, PM Goh's statement, after the results were announced, represents an authoritative reaffirmation by the Government of the importance of maintaining a harmonious multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-lingual society with English as a common working language.

This aspect of the Election results cannot be understated. It affects all Singaporeans whether we are from the majority community or from the minority communities.

That Singaporean voters reiterated this commitment to a multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-lingual society is important because, as PM Goh stated "The deep fault lines in our society over race, language, culture and religion will not go away. We must manage these emotional issues carefully."

It took courage for PM Goh to bring up this issue in the Election because there was a real risk that in attacking the Chinese chauvinism of Tang Liang Hong, he would inadvertently alienate the Chinese ground and lose many votes. But as the PM pointed out, he felt it was important to put the issue to the electorate and tackle it during the campaign, even at the risk of losing some votes.

It was an issue of principle critical to our nation. One had to take a stand. When forces of extremism and divisiveness rear their head - we cannot gloss over the matter. We have to take a stand, and the question was whether the voters would reject these forces and endorse the norm of tolerance, harmony and politics of consensus.

There are those who believe that the issue in this General Election was on material aspects such as upgrading of HDB (Housing and Development Board) flats. They have missed the significance of this point.

The Election was more than about upgrading. Very vital principles were at stake. The Government took a stand. The electors took a stand. The resultant victory was not just a victory for the PAP but for Singapore and all Singaporeans. The people rejected the politics of extremism and dissension in favour of politics of consensus, multi-racial harmony and tolerance. Our neighbours in ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) have taken note of our stand, as can be seen from some articles in the Malaysian press, and many articles in the Indonesian

press. We have reinforced our reputation as a multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-religious South East Asian society - a society where the minority communities will always have room to maintain their distinct cultures and identities and where we stand up for our national interests and will not allow ourselves to become a Chinese base in South East Asia.

In this Election the focus was on Chinese chauvinism, and PM pointed out in his victory press conference "Chinese Singaporeans, as a majority community, must always be mindful of the sensitivities of our minority communities."

However, minority communities must note in particular that multi-racial harmony requires all sectors of our society to work hard to ensure that it endures. The continuation of multi-racialism, tolerance and harmony is not dependent on the majority community, the Chinese, alone. An equal responsibility rests on us, the minority communities, to ensure that our communities also continuously foster the concepts of tolerance, understanding, harmony. We must never let chauvinism and extremism take root in our own communities.

Minority communities must also be sensitive to the difficulties that the majority community has of charting a course that will preserve their ethnic identity in language and culture but that will at the same time maintain enough common interest and identity with the minority communities to make a multi-racial society real and meaningful. For example, when the Chinese promote their "Speak Mandarin Campaigns", rather than being alarmed, we should understand and support them because they want to preserve their mother tongue, just as we want to preserve ours.

The Sikh Community

At previous functions, other Government leaders, notably PM Goh, DPM Lee, have commended the Sikh Community in Singapore for your many achievements even though your community numbers only about 14,000.

But I am also glad to note that you have recognised that not all Sikhs are doing well, and that you are addressing this problem. Your leaders have concluded that the main cause of the problem is that some Sikh children have not been sufficiently immersed in the Sikh value system and have therefore not had an opportunity to develop their sense of personal self-worth, which has been a critical factor of the Sikh success story. This is being remedied by various self-help projects to improve educational standards and assist the less fortunate. These schemes include the Singapore Sikh Education Foundation and the Sikh Welfare Council. You have now also set up the Young Khalsa in order to invest in the young. Sikh Temples are also setting up Youth Wings to organise activities for the young and impart Sikh values to them.

These commendable schemes will take off because of your strong community spirit. I understand the call for help, including financial help, has received an overwhelming response from Sikh institutions, temples, business men, professionals and teachers.

I am glad, in particular, that your Youth Wing, the Young Khalsa, is being launched today. Young Khalsa's mission is to reach out to the Sikh youth in particular. Young Khalsa aims to persuade a greater awareness and involvement of these youths in the society. It hopes to work closely with the National Youth Council and People's Association in carrying out some of its activities. Its activities would include adventure and sports, community service and youth development.

The objective is to promote a healthy lifestyle among Sikh youth through participation in sports and recreation activities, to facilitate interaction and networking among Sikh youth and other like-minded national youth organisations.

The Sikhs are also aware that the quest for self-improvement is a never-ending one. The leaders of your community are alive to the fact that Sikhs must keep pace with and adapt to the technological changes in the world. I am confident that the Sikhs will continue to do well. You have all the ingredients to remain successful: first, a value system which is ingrained in all Sikhs, including children; secondly, you have built effective self-help networks; thirdly, while remaining protective of your culture, you are striving to adapt to the changes in the world; and lastly, you have added value to societies which you have become part of.

I am confident that the Sikh community will continue to be a thriving, dynamic community and continue to make an important contribution to Singapore.

@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@