

ISTANA PRESS RELEASE

=====

EMBARGO INSTRUCTIONS

The attached press release/speech is EMBARGOED till delivery.
Please check against delivery.
For assistance call 3757795

=====

SPRINTER 3.0, Singapore's Press Releases on the Internet) is located at:
<http://www.gov.sg/sprinter/>

=====

EMBARGOED TILL AFTER DELIVERY
PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

WELCOMING ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT ONG TENG CHEONG AT THE LUNCH IN HONOUR OF THE
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
YEMEN HIS EXCELLENCY ALI ABDULLAH SALEH ON THURSDAY,
18 MARCH 1999 AT 12.45 PM AT THE ISTANA

National Archives of Singapore
Your Excellency

Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the government and people of Singapore, I bid a very warm welcome to you, President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and members of your distinguished delegation. Singapore is deeply honoured to have the first visit by a Head of State from Yemen. Your visit is a landmark development in our bilateral relations. It reflects our mutual desire to enhance the friendship between our two countries.

Excellency

At first glance, Singapore and Yemen appear to have little in common. Yemen, the birthplace of Arab civilisation, is a country with a long and rich

Page 1

history. For many, the wealth and splendour of ancient Yemen have been immortalised by the Queen of Saba. On the other hand, Singapore is a city-state with a short history of less than two centuries.

1 Saba (Arabic) – Sheba (Hebrew)

But we do have some common features. For example, trade is of vital importance for both our countries. For hundreds of years, Yemen has been a centre for caravan trade in spices. In the 17th and 18th centuries, Yemen became a major trader of coffee. The strategic port city of Aden became an important jumping-off point for one of the key sea routes for trade with Asia. The opening of the Suez Canal further enhanced Aden's importance in the commerce between Europe and Asia. It was the push by Europe for trade with Asia in the 17th and 18th century that led to the founding of Singapore in 1819. Today, Singapore's total trade is three times its GNP. Our prosperity depends crucially on the maintenance of an open international trading system.

There have also been close people-to-people contacts. Yemen is no stranger to Southeast Asia. In fact, there is a special relationship between Yemen and this region. Yemeni Arabs, particularly those of the Hadrami stock, established contacts with Southeast Asia as early as the 18th century. The majority of the Arabs in Singapore are from Yemen. Many of these Arab Singaporeans still maintain close contacts with their relatives in Yemen.

Excellency

Today, globalisation and rapid developments in technology offer the opportunity for enhanced relations between the Middle East and Asia. Indeed, Your Excellency's presence here today bears testimony to this. We live in an interdependent world that requires all nations to work with one another. The current regional economic crisis that Southeast Asia is facing exemplifies this interdependence. However, I am confident that our economies will emerge stronger after this difficult period of adjustment. It is important to remain plugged to the global economy as economies all over the world are competing to attract trade and investments.

Your Excellency's visit has raised Singapore's awareness of Yemen. In the past, a lack of knowledge has limited the economic ties between our two countries. There is potential for greater economic relations. We should continue to look for new areas of co-operation. Both governments should serve as the bridge for our private sectors to capitalise on any new opportunities. With new areas of co-operation, there will be closer relations between our two countries and regions.

Excellency

Once again, I bid you welcome. Your visit is but the first step towards a relationship of mutual benefit. It is only through exchanges at all levels that substantive relations could be created and sustained.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

May I ask you to rise and join me in a toast:

- i) to the good health and success of His Excellency President Ali Abdulrahman Salih;
- ii) to peace and prosperity for the people of Yemen;
- iii) to the friendship between Yemen and Singapore.

otc19990318b

National Archives of Singapore