

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT, DR. BENJAMIN SHEARES, AT THE STATE BANQUET  
IN HONOUR OF THEIR IMPERIAL MAJESTIES, THE SHAHANSHAH ARYAMEHR AND  
SHAHRANOU OF IRAN, AT THE ISTANA ON THURSDAY, 19TH SEPTEMBER, 1974

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Your Imperial Majesties,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies & Gentlemen,

The visit of your Imperial Majesties to Singapore is a landmark in the history of both our countries. Though we are both in Asia and on the rim of the Indian Ocean, for all practical purposes, we have been strangers. A curtain of ignorance has given to both our countries a remoteness unwarranted by geography. It was only a few months ago that we both exchanged Ambassadors. Cultural and political contacts between us are few and far between, largely because we are as yet unaware of several areas of common concern.

The visit of your Imperial Majesties and members of your entourage to Singapore formally ends this long era of isolation. There are already many signs that relations between our two countries are slowly but steadily growing at an appreciable rate. The live telecast via satellite of the opening of the Asian Games, so impressively organised by your country, dispelled this sense of remoteness, especially when we could see our own contingent to these Games amongst Iranians.

A measure of continuing and sustained relations between us is the steady growth of trade. During the past decade, trade between our two countries has increased steadily.

This is largely due to the single-mindedness with which your Imperial Majesty has pursued the transformation and modernisation of a country with a civilisation as ancient and splendid as any in the world. Archeologists have unearthed evidence of various phases of Iranian civilisation going back to 6000 B.C.

The contrast in historical depth between Iran and Singapore is one which would not have escaped your Imperial Majesty's notice. Your journey into the modern world began some 8000 years ago. That of Singapore began only a century and a half ago. As a community of many races and creeds, our history begins with the recent era of European dominance. Each group brought along in its ethnic, cultural and linguistic appurtenances. The peoples and cultures from different parts of Asia, India, Malaysia, Indonesia and China came together and amalgamated under a British administration.

This is the contrast between Iran and Singapore. History stresses differences between peoples and nations. And it would be a dull world indeed were such differences to be lost in one grey melange. However, the future of mankind requires that nations and states become also aware of their inter-related destinies. Modern science and technology have made inter-dependence between nations a fact of life for the present, and ever more so for the future. Many peoples and nations have been brought in ever close proximity in one world, with the barriers of communications and transportation surmounted with ease by modern science and technology.

Your Imperial Majesty's visit to Singapore makes the average Singaporean suddenly aware that Iran is not a far-away place with ancient monuments to bear witness to past glory but a near and important neighbour transforming rapidly into a modern industrial state, destined for new glories by virtue of your leadership, an ancient people's potential now to be re-discovered with the help of huge oil resources, and a most strategic position, guarding the Gulf with more than half the world's oil supplies flowing through it into the Indian Ocean.

We in Singapore share your view that this Ocean should remain free and readily accessible to all nations, that it should be an area of stability free of restrictions and barriers. We therefore support your Imperial Majesty's untiring efforts towards the promotion of greater regional and international co-operation. We have watched with interest the foresight and wisdom with which your Imperial Majesty has planned the social and economic development of your country. A prosperous, dynamic and outward-looking Iran will be a source of strength and a factor for stability in the countries of the Gulf and of the Indian Ocean.

Finally, may I express the wish that your Imperial Majesties and members of your entourage will have a pleasant stay in Singapore and that you will take back with you our friendship for the people and government of Iran.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, may I request you  
to join me in a toast to the good health and happiness of their  
Imperial Majesties, the Shahanshah Aryamehr and Shahbanou of Iran  
and to the progress and prosperity of the people of Iran.

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