

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY DR AHMAD MATTAR, MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT,
AT A DINNER FOR PAST AND PRESENT MUIS COUNCIL MEMBERS
HELD AT THE PENTHOUSE OF THE MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT
BUILDING, SCOTTS ROAD ON MONDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 1989 AT 7.30 PM

This dinner is a small gesture of my deep and sincere appreciation for the sacrifice in the time and more importantly the valuable contributions and feedback MUIS Council Members have given to the MUIS Secretariat and indirectly to me to improve the religious and general welfare of our Muslim community.

Much progress has been made by MUIS in the last three years under the able leadership of its President, Hj Ridzwan b Hj Dzafir. Despite his heavy commitments in the other areas of work, he has kindly agreed to continue with the leadership role in MUIS and will do so for another year. I must say that I am very thankful for his magnanimous response. I am also equally thankful to all the present members of MUIS Council for having agreed to serve for a term of three years.

The first big challenge that MUIS Council Members will face during its present tenure of office is the development of five new mosques under Phase III of the Mosque Building Programme. Five of the nine mosques planned under Phase II have been completed and the remaining four are under various stages of construction.

If existing planning guidelines for mosque development in HDB New Towns were to be strictly adhered to, there would not be any mosque development for the rest of this century, apart from those currently under construction. This is because HDB New Towns currently being developed are relatively small. However bearing in mind that even smaller New Towns require a mosque for the Muslim population the Government has revised the planning guidelines and has allocated one mosque in each of these smaller HDB New Towns: Serangoon, Bishan, Choa Chu Kang, Pasir Ris and Bukit Panjang. Each of these mosques will be given a site area of about 2500 sq m. This is smaller than the 0.3 ha site given for each of the mosques built under Phases I and II of the Mosque Building Programme except for Masjid Muhajirin at Toa Payoh and Masjid Mujahidin at Queenstown, which have a land area of approximately 1900 sq m each.

In addition to the five new mosques to be developed under Phase III of the Mosque Building Programme, a 0.3 ha site has also been allocated along Bedok Reservoir Road for the new Masjid Alkaff. MUIS has been given up till 1992 to build this mosque. The present Masjid Alkaff will be demolished once the new mosque is ready for occupation.

The new policy to be adopted in the development of the mosques under Phase III of the Mosque Building Programme is that, with the reduced site area, the predominant use of the built-up area should be for prayers. Ancillary uses, which in the mosques built under Phases I and II have taken up a large proportion of the built-up area, should now be cut down considerably. The thinking is that mosques should not duplicate and provide activities not related to a mosque which can be provided elsewhere.

It is only through interaction with other communities that greater understanding and co-operation can be fostered.

If the Muslim community organises activities which exclude other communities from participating and vice-versa, our society will never be cohesive as we will not be given a chance to understand each other's way of life and beliefs. In the multi-racial community that we live in, our actions must constantly display our desire to establish harmony among people of different communities.

There are among the Muslims in Singapore some whose activities are of great concern to Muslim leaders. I am referring to the rising number of Malays who are taking to drugs. The authorities are faced with a massive task of rehabilitating them to lead a new life free from the pernicious and debilitating effects of drugs. MUIS should consider ways to help solve this problem. One way is to involve the JHDs to teach parents of young children how to care for them and supervise them in their activities so that they are not given a chance to mix with youths experimenting with drugs and be influenced by them.

MUIS Council Members must therefore be conscious of the important role that MUIS can and must play to try to guide Muslims in Singapore to take the right and moderate path in the practice of Islam.

MUIS Council Members, in the course of their meetings with members of the Muslim community, will have to defend MUIS stand on such issues. They must share the aims which MUIS is striving to achieve and the conviction to explain to the public that what MUIS is doing is for the general good of the Muslim community and enables them to progress in tandem with the rest of the population.

I pray that Allah will guide the President of MUIS and Members of the Council in their work and that through their leadership the Muslims in Singapore will be benefitted in their religious, education and economic well-being.

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